VOLUME IIa.

SYSTEMATIC PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY

ON GOD: ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

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WILEY Blackwell

Systematic Philosophical Theology

Systematic Philosophical Theology

On God: Attributes of God

Volume IIa

William Lane Craig

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This edition first published 2025
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Applied for:
Hardback ISBN: 9781394278770

Cover Design: Wiley

Set in 11.5/14pt STIXTwoText by Straive, Pondicherry, India

To Jan, who inspired this monumental project and sustained me throughout.

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Preface to Volume IIa

I have little to add to my general Preface affixed to vol. I. Given the size of the locus *De Deo*, which constitutes the heart of Christian theology, it seemed best to commence a new volume with this topic. Indeed, the subject proved to be so large in scope that, in order to keep the volumes in this series to approximately similar lengths, it was decided to break this volume into two parts. Accordingly, in vol. IIa I treat the attributes of God or, in philosophical parlance, the coherence of theism. This field has been my preoccupation since completing my doctoral work, yielding extensive studies of the coherence of divine omniscience, eternity, and aseity. Here I discuss nine of the central attributes of God, examining both their biblical basis and their most plausible philosophical articulation. Although I consider myself to stand in the tradition of classical theism, it will become obvious that I do not embrace strong accounts of divine simplicity, immutability, or impassibility.

In the Preface to vol. I I asked whether there were any philosophical distinctives that characterize this systematic philosophical theology. The present volume prompts me to ask a similar question about theological distinctives. Already in vol. I my Molinist convictions began to surface, playing the key role in articulating a plausible doctrine of verbal, plenary, confluent biblical inspiration. The present volume permits me to explain more fully the doctrine of divine middle knowledge, which is in my opinion one of

the most fruitful theological concepts ever conceived. Molinism plays such a major part in my understanding of Christian doctrine that I think these volumes deserve to be described as a Molinist systematic theology, the first such that I am aware of in centuries.

In vol. IIb we turn from generic theism to the subject of the Trinity. I am convinced that the New Testament teaches a primitive doctrine of the Trinity, according to which (i) there is exactly one God, and (ii) there are exactly three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – who are properly called God. I hope to show that such a doctrine is not only logically coherent but can also be plausibly modeled along Social Trinitarian lines as tri-personal monotheism.

In between the discussion of the coherence of theism and the discussion of Trinitarian theism is the logical place for an Excursus on Natural Theology. Although, as I explained in the Prolegomena to these volumes, I do not consider natural theology to belong inherently to systematic theology, since the systematician does not bear the burden of proving his scripturally based doctrinal claims, nonetheless natural theology has historically been a part of some systematic theologies, and so the inclusion of such an Excursus seems altogether appropriate, given my great interest in the field. Having already defended the proper basicality of theistic belief in the locus *De fide*, I here offer six arguments for the existence of God that I find convincing, including the Leibnizian argument from contingency, the *kalām* cosmological argument, the argument from the uncanny applicability of mathematics to physical phenomena, the teleological argument from the fine-tuning of the universe for embodied, conscious agents, the moral argument from the objectivity of moral values and duties, and the ontological argument from the metaphysical possibility of a maximally great being. Also included in this Excursus is a response to the principal atheistic counter-arguments, particularly the so-called problem of evil and suffering.

In our Prolegomena I explained that the subject matter of Christian systematic theology is God and anything else in relation to God. Having laid in this volume the theistic foundations, we may move in vol. III to *De creatione*, other things in relation to God.

I wish to thank once again my research assistant Timothy Bayless for his hard work in compiling the indices and bibliography and helping to put the typescript into Wiley-Blackwell's house style.

Although I draw in this volume from previous publications, I have in every case updated and expanded my earlier discussion. Previous publications relevant to vol. II include: *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez,* Studies in Intellectual

History 7 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988); *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom: The Coherence of Theism I: Omniscience,* Studies in Intellectual History 19 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991); *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987; *God, Time and Eternity* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001); *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001); *Reasonable Faith,* 3rd ed. rev. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008); "The *Kalam* Cosmological Argument," with James Sinclair in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ed. Wm. L. Craig and J. P. Moreland (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 101–201; "Divine Eternity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas Flint and Michael Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 145–66; *God Over All: Divine Aseity and the Challenge of Platonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); *God and Abstract Objects: The Coherence of Theism III: Aseity* (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 2017); *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, with J. P. Moreland, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017); *A Debate on God and Morality: What Is the Best Account of Objective Moral Values and Duties?* with Erik J. Wielenberg, ed. A. Johnson (London: Routledge, 2020); "The Argument from the Applicability of Mathematics," in *Contemporary Arguments in Natural Theology: God and Rational Belief*, ed. C. Ruloff and P. Horban (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), pp. 195–215.

Locus III

De Deo

PART I: *ATTRIBUTA DEI*

1
Introduction

The existence and nature of God are central concerns of Christian theology. While the systematic theologian may not engage in natural theology but may simply assume on the basis of scriptural teaching that the God of the Bible exists, he cannot be indifferent to the question of the nature or attributes of the biblical God, since God's nature is determinative for the entire Christian theological system. Unfortunately, in the words of Lutheran theologian Robert Preus, "The doctrine of God is the most difficult *locus* in Christian dogmatics."[1] Does God exist necessarily or contingently? Is he absolutely simple or complex? Is he timeless or omnitemporal? Does he transcend space or fill space? Does his almighty power imply the ability to do the logically impossible or are there limits to his power? Systematic theologians have often assumed uncritically traditional answers to these sorts of questions, answers that have been sharply challenged in modern times. During the late twentieth century the concept of God became fertile ground for anti-theistic philosophical arguments. The difficulty with theism, it was often said, is not merely that there are no

[1] Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 2 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 2:53.

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William Lane Craig.
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good arguments for the existence of God, but, more fundamentally, that the concept of God is incoherent.[2]

It is here that the contribution of contemporary Christian philosophers to systematic theology has been most pronounced and helpful. The anti-theistic critique evoked a prodigious literature devoted to the philosophical analysis of the concept of God.[3] As a result, one of the principal concerns of contemporary philosophy of religion has been the coherence of theism.

Two controls have tended to guide this inquiry into the divine nature: Scripture and so-called perfect being theology. For thinkers in the Judeo-Christian tradition, God's self-revelation in Scripture is obviously paramount in understanding what God is like. Still, while Scripture is our supreme authority in formulating a doctrine of God, so that doctrines contrary to biblical teaching are theologically unacceptable, contemporary thinkers have come to appreciate that the doctrine of God is underdetermined by the biblical data. The biblical authors were not philosophical theologians but in many cases storytellers whose accounts of man's relationship with God bear all the marks of the storyteller's art, being told from a human perspective without reflection upon philosophical considerations. The biblical theologian will therefore search in vain for clear answers to many philosophical questions concerning the divine attributes. Answers taken for granted by traditional dogmaticians need to be brought anew before the bar of Scripture and their biblical support and consonance re-examined.

In addition, St. Anselm's conception of God as a being than which a greater cannot be conceived (*aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit*)[4] or

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[2] Thus, an obviously unsympathetic critic like Kai Nielsen characterizes fellow atheists "who believe 'There is a God' is simply false" as "Neanderthal atheists," whereas atheists like himself "who reject the very concept of God as unintelligible" are "non-Neanderthal atheists" (Kai Nielsen, "A Sceptic's Reply," in *Faith and the Philosophers,* ed. John Hick [London: Macmillan, 1964], 232).

[3] See William J. Wainwright, *Philosophy of Religion: An Annotated Bibliography of Twentieth-Century Writings in English* (New York: Garland, 1978). Reference works in philosophy of religion thus almost always include a sizable section on the various attributes of God, for example, Chad Meister and Paul Copan, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion,* Routledge Philosophy Companions (London: Routledge, 2007), pt. 4; Paul Copan and Chad Meister, eds. *Philosophy of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Issues* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pt. 3; Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pt. 2; Charles Taliaferro, Paul Draper, and Philip L. Quinn, eds., *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd ed., Blackwell Companions to Philosophy 8 (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pt. 4; Charles Taliaferro and Chad Meister, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pt. 1; Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Religion*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021). The same is true of anthologies in philosophy of religion.

[4] In his *Proslogion* 2 Anselm thus addresses God: "And, indeed, we believe that thou art a being than which nothing greater can be conceived." Cf. *Proslogion* 3: "this being thou art, O Lord, our God." Hoffman and Rosenkrantz explain, "Another way of putting the matter replaces the partly psychological term 'can be conceived' with the wholly modal term 'is possible,' resulting in a definition which states that God is a being than which nothing greater is *possible*. Such a revision is advantageous in that the resulting definition is less psychological, and therefore, more objective" (Joshua Hoffman and Gary S. Rosenkrantz, "Divine Attributes" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021), https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119009924.eopr0106). Anselm thought that "if a mind could conceive of a being better than thee, the creature would rise above the Creator; and this is most absurd" (*Proslogion* III). This does not seem to be a very good reason for understanding God to be such a being, since one can conceive of things greater than oneself, whether existent or non-existent. It would be better to stipulate that by "God" one means the being than which a greater cannot be conceived, so that it impossible to conceive of something greater than God. Intuitively, this is what believers mean by "God."

most perfect being (*ens perfectissimum*) has guided philosophical speculation on the raw data of Scripture, so that God's biblical attributes are to be conceived in ways that would serve to exalt God's greatness.[5] The biblical concept of God's being almighty, for example, is thus to be construed as maximally as possible. John Hick aptly credits Anselm for bringing the Christian doctrine of God to full flower:

> Perhaps the most valuable feature of Anselm's argument is its formulation of the Christian concept of God. Augustine (*De Libero Arbitrio* II, 6, 14) had used the definition of God as one 'than whom there is nothing superior.' . . . Anselm, however, does not define God as the most perfect being that there is but as a being than whom no more perfect is even conceivable. This represents the final development of the monotheistic conception. God is the most adequate conceivable object of worship; there is no possibility of another reality beyond him to which he is inferior or subordinate and which would thus be an even more worthy recipient of man's devotion. Thus metaphysical ultimacy and moral ultimacy coincide; one cannot ask of the most perfect conceivable being. . . whether men ought to worship him. Here the religious exigencies that move from polytheism through henotheism to ethical monotheism reach their logical terminus. And the credit belongs to Anselm for having first formulated this central core of the ultimate concept of deity.[6]

Unfortunately, the conception of God as a perfect being is not without its ambiguity. Nagasawa takes God to be "the greatest metaphysically possible being," a view he calls the perfect being thesis.[7] Nagasawa holds that the perfect being thesis need not be taken to entail that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent, since those properties are a matter of philosophical dispute, but simply that God has "the maximal consistent set of knowledge, power, and benevolence."[8] He thinks that there are neither biblical grounds nor compelling philosophical arguments for the entailment of the omni-attributes "in a philosophically strict sense." That seems to me a dubious stratagem for perfect being theology, since the

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[5] Of Anselm's concept, Brian Leftow comments, "Talk of God as a perfect being is certainly appropriate theologically, and perfect being theology has been the main tool to give content to the concept of God philosophically almost as long as there has been philosophical theology" (Brian Leftow, "The Ontological Argument," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. William J. Wainwright [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005], 110). Yujin Nagasawa observes that "Perfect being theism is widely accepted among Judeo-Christian-Islamic theists today. It is no exaggeration to say that nearly all the central debates over the existence and nature of God in the philosophy of religion rely on this form of theism" (Yujin Nagasawa, *Maximal God: A New Defence of Perfect Being Theism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017], 2; cf. 7).

[6] John Hick, "Ontological Argument for the Existence of God," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., ed. Donald M. Borchert (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006), 7:15–20. Nagasawa traces the Anselmian concept of God all the way back to Plato (*Maximal God,* 15–24).

[7] Nagasawa, 9.

[8] Nagasawa, 92.

maximal, consistent set of attributes could describe a limited and finite God. Nagasawa's construal seems to rule out the incoherence of theism by definition.

By contrast, Michael Almeida takes as "a defining feature of perfect being theology" the inference from the proposition that God is a perfect being to the conclusion that God has every property that it is better to exemplify than not.[9] Unfortunately, it will not always be clear which properties it is absolutely better to have than to lack. My own understanding and utilization of perfect being theology is more informative, being what Almeida calls a posteriori Anselmianism, which extrapolates divine attributes from Scripture as greatly as possible.[10]

Since the concept of God is underdetermined by the biblical data and since what constitutes a "great-making" property is to some degree debatable, philosophers working within the Judeo-Christian tradition enjoy considerable latitude in formulating a philosophically coherent and biblically faithful doctrine of God. Philosophical theists have thus found that anti-theistic critiques of certain conceptions of God can actually be quite helpful in framing a more adequate conception. Thus, far from undermining theism, the anti-theistic critiques have served mainly to reveal how rich and interesting the concept of God is, thereby refining and strengthening theistic belief.

In what follows we shall explore some of the most important attributes traditionally ascribed to God.

[9] Michael J. Almeida, "Perfect Being Theology," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021), https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119009924.eopr0295.

[10] Observing that it is hard to deduce divine attributes from the claim that God is a perfect being, Michael Rea suggests, "Perhaps instead. . . we should think that the claim that God is perfect merely imposes constraints on our theorizing about the divine attributes; or perhaps we should think. . . that our grasp of perfection simply helps us to flesh out our understanding of divine attributes that we arrive at via special revelation or some other route" (Michael C. Rea "Introduction," in *Essays in Analytic Theology,* Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology, vol. 1, by Michael C. Rea [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021], 11).

2
Incorporeality

Fundamental to Christian theology is the conviction that God is an incorporeal being. Despite the etymology, by "divine incorporeality" we do not mean that God is without a body – indeed, according to the Christian doctrine of the incarnation, God the Son does have a human body since the moment of his assumption of a complete human nature in Mary's virginal conception of Jesus – but rather that God is an immaterial being. Just as the human soul, whether embodied or disembodied, is taken by anthropological dualists to be immaterial, so God, whether bodiless or incarnate, is an immaterial substance distinct from the world.

2.1 Biblical Data Concerning Divine Incorporeality

2.1.1 Divine Creation

Among the most important scriptural evidences for God's immateriality are passages affirming God's creation of the physical world, indeed, of everything distinct from himself. The Bible opens with the majestic words: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1.1). Although we shall have much more to say about this passage in our locus *De creatione*, we may note in passing that most scholars today recognize this statement to be an independent clause, not a subordinate clause. Moreover, v. 1 is arguably not simply a title for the creation story, since it

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is connected to v. 2 by *waw* (and) and, if taken as a title, would be inaccurate, since the ensuing account does not, in fact, describe the creation of the earth (v. 2). The author of the opening chapter of Genesis thereby differentiated his viewpoint from that of the ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian creation myths. For the author of Genesis 1, no pre-existent material seems to be assumed – in the beginning there is only God, who is said simply to "create" "the heavens and the earth," a Hebrew merism for the totality of the world or, more simply, the universe. Neither is the world said to have been created out of the divine substance, as in some Ancient Near Eastern myths.

The conception of God in Genesis 1 is thus stunningly different from anything else in the Ancient Near East. The dominant and distinguishing tenet of Hebrew thought, state Henri Frankfort and H. A. Frankfort, is the absolute transcendence of God.[1] Nahum Sarna encapsulates the teaching of the biblical creation narrative thus: "Its quintessential teaching is that the universe is wholly the purposeful product of divine intelligence, that is, of the one self-sufficient, self-existing God, who is a transcendent Being outside of nature and who is sovereign over space and time."[2] The author of Genesis 1 thus gives us to understand that God is independent of and the Creator of the material realm, thereby implying that he is not a material object.

In the New Testament (NT) the prologue of John's Gospel underlines the teaching of the Genesis creation story. The author begins, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (Jn 1.1–3). Harking back to Gen 1.1, the author affirms that in the very beginning all that exists is God and his Word (*logos*). Then everything else comes into existence through God's Word. The verb *ginomai* (v. 3) has the meaning "to be created" or "to come into being." Creation comes to the fore by John's indicating the agent who was responsible for all things' coming into being. John speaks of God's Word as the one "through whom" (*di' autou*) all things came into being. So at the very beginning is God and his Word, and then everything else comes into being through the creatorial power of God's Word.

By the time of the NT classical Platonism had evolved into so-called Middle Platonism, and Hellenistic Judaism bears its imprint. The doctrine of the

[1] H. Frankfort and H. A. Frankfort, "The Emancipation of Thought from Myth," in *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man: An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East*, by Henri Frankfort et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), 367.

[2] Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 3–4; cf. xii.

divine creative Logos found in John's prologue was widespread in Middle Platonism, being attested as early as Antiochus of Ascalon (125–68 B.C.) and Eudorus (first century B.C.), two of the earliest Middle Platonists. Hellenistic Jews, notably Philo of Alexandria (20 B.C.–A.D. 50), adapted the Logos doctrine to Jewish monotheism. The similarities between Philo and John's doctrines of the Logos are so numerous and so close that most Johannine scholars, while not willing to affirm John's direct dependence on Philo, do recognize that the author of the prologue of John's Gospel shares with Philo a common intellectual tradition of a Middle Platonic interpretation of Genesis 1.[3]

Interested as he is in the incarnation of the divine Logos, John does not pause to reflect on the state of the Logos "in the beginning," causally prior to creation. But this pre-creation state does feature prominently in Philo's doctrine of the Logos. According to David Runia, a cornerstone of Middle Platonism was the division of reality into the intelligible and the sensible realms.[4] The former realm is grasped by the intellect, while the latter is perceived by the senses. The sensible realm comprised primarily physical objects, while the intelligible realm included what we would today call abstract objects. For Middle Platonists, as for Plato, the intelligible world served as a model for the creation of the sensible world. As a Jewish monotheist, Philo thinks that this intelligible world exists as the contents of the divine mind.

This view was not original to Philo, however. The interpretation of the Platonic Ideas as thoughts in the mind of God was characteristic of Middle Platonism and became widespread throughout the ancient world.[5] For example, Nicomachus of Gerasa (ca. A.D. 60–120), held that of the four subjects of the classical quadrivium,

> arithmetic . . . existed before all the others in the mind of the creating God like some universal and exemplary plan, relying upon which as a design

[3] So Jutta Leonhardt-Balzer, "Der Logos und die Schöpfung: Streiflichter bei Philo (Op 20–25) und im Johannesprolog (Joh 1, 1–18)" in *Kontexte des Johannesevangeliums*, ed. Jörg Frey and Udo Schnelle, WUNT 175 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 309–310, with citations of extensive literature; cf. Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 2 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 1:346–347.

[4] David T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the* Timaeus *of Plato* (Amsterdam: Free University of Amsterdam, 1983), 68. The *locus classicus* of the distinction was Plato's *Timaeus* 27d5–28a4. The distinction at issue is not really intelligible vs. sensible; rather it is being vs. becoming. The problem with the former characterization of the distinction is that it seems to leave no place for immaterial concrete objects like angels or souls. Given that intelligible objects exist in the mind of God, such beings cannot be classed as part of the intelligible realm. They must be part of the sensible realm, which is thus more accurately described as the realm of objects subject to temporal becoming. On this view God, though concrete, belongs to the realm of being and so is changeless.

[5] See Audrey N. M. Rich, "The Platonic Ideas as the Thoughts of God," *Mnemosyne* 7 (1954): 123–333. R. M. Jones says that the doctrine of the Platonic Ideas as God's thoughts was so well-known by Philo's time that Philo could employ it without hesitation (Roger Miller Jones, "The Ideas as the Thoughts of God," *Classical Philology* 21, no. 4 [1926]: 317–326).

> and archetypal example, the Creator of the universe sets in order his material creations and makes them attain their proper ends. . . .
>
> All that has by nature with systematic method been arranged in the universe seems both in part and as a whole to have been determined and ordered in accordance with number, by the forethought and the mind of him that created all things; for the pattern was fixed, like a preliminary sketch, by the domination of number preexistent in the mind of the world-creating God, number conceptual only and immaterial in every way, but at the same time the true and the eternal essence, so that with reference to it, as to an artistic plan, should be created all these things, time, motion, the heavens, the stars, all sorts of revolutions.[6]

Notice that the material world is created on the pattern pre-existing in the immaterial divine mind. Philo concurred. The intelligible world (*kosmos noētos*), he maintains, may be thought of as either formed by the divine Logos or, more reductively, as the Logos itself as God is engaged in creating. In his *On the Creation of the World according to Moses* 16–20 he writes:

> God, because he is God, understood in advance that a fair copy would not come into existence apart from a fair model, and that none of the objects of sense-perception would be without fault, unless it was modeled on the archetypal and intelligible idea. When he had decided to construct this visible cosmos, he first marked out the intelligible cosmos, so that he could use it as an incorporeal and most god-like paradigm and so produce the corporeal cosmos, a younger likeness of an older model, which would contain as many sense-perceptible kinds as there were intelligible kinds in that other one.

Notice that Philo holds corporeal things to be patterned on the incorporeal models in the divine mind.

We cannot know if the author of the prologue to John's Gospel embraced a Middle Platonic doctrine of divine ideas. But whether or not he did, there can be no doubt, I think, that given the similarity of his Logos doctrine to that of Middle Platonism, he understood God and his Logos to transcend the material realm and so to be immaterial in nature.[7]

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[6] Nicomachus of Gerasa, *Introduction to Arithmetic* I.4, 6, trans. Martin Luther D'Ooge (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926), 187, 189.

[7] The same Middle Platonism, epitomized in Philo, that forms the background of John's prologue also shapes the traditions that Paul hands on. See discussion in my *God Over All: Divine Aseity and the Challenge of Platonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 24–27.

2.1.2 Divine Omnipresence

Second, in addition to biblical passages like those cited earlier on divine transcendence and creation, passages expressing God's omnipresence are naturally interpreted to imply divine immateriality. We shall review scriptural data supporting God's ubiquity when we discuss the divine attribute of omnipresence.[8] For now suffice it to say that biblically God is not thought to be located in a particular place as material objects are but is said to be everywhere in space. If we think of divine omnipresence as God's transcending space while being cognizant of and active at every place in space, then divine immateriality follows at once, since any material object is spatially located. On the other hand if we take God to exist spatially, it would be implausible to think of him as extended throughout all space like the aether of nineteenth century physics, for then parts of him would exist here and parts there, which is certainly not the biblical notion of God's entire presence to anyone wherever he might find himself (Ps 139.7–10). Wherever anyone is in space God is there to help him when called upon. If God is spatially located, then, he must be wholly located at every region of space that he occupies, that is to say, at every region. In that case, he would have to be extended throughout space after the fashion of a mereologically simple object, having no proper spatial parts but occupying multiple regions of space. Some Christian theists, as we shall see, conceive the soul to be so extended throughout the body, wholly present at every spatial sub-region of the body, and some have even suggested that God, too, may be extended throughout space, wholly present at every region. But these thinkers conceive God and the soul to be immaterial beings and so able to have no parts located at different places in space. How a material object could be spatially extended and yet simple is almost unimaginable, although some philosophers have defended such a notion.[9] We can say with assurance that none of the scriptural writers affirms such a conception of God as an extended, material simple. It is far more plausible that if they assumed God to be literally spatially present everywhere, it was because God was thought to be an immaterial spirit (Ps 139.7).

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[8] See *infra*, chap. 8.

[9] Cody Gilmore, "Location and Mereology," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2018 Edition), §5 "Extended Simples," https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/location-mereology/.

2.1.3 Divine Imperceptibility

Third, the biblical descriptions of God as indiscernible to the five senses confirm divine immateriality. The Scriptures repeatedly testify that God is invisible. I Timothy speaks of him "whom no man has ever seen or can see" (6.16) and offers this doxology: "To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be power and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1.17). God's invisibility will naturally encompass not merely God's imperceptibility by eyesight, but also his imperceptibility by the rest of the five senses, such as touch and smell. In Rom 1.18–20 Paul says that though God is in heaven, "Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made." Moreover, Paul says of Christ that "in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily" (Col 2.9), and thus "He is the image of the invisible God" (Col 1.15). In the same way, Jn 1.18 states, "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (cf. 6.46; I Jn 4.12, 20). God's imperceptibility to the five senses, apart from his revelation in the world and his embodiment in Christ, is naturally accounted for by God's not being a physical object.

2.1.4 Prohibition of Divine Images

Fourth, the OT prohibition of making images of God (Ex 20.4–5a) is ultimately rooted in divine incorporeality. The prohibition is motivated, not by the danger of inaccurately portraying God's material form, but more fundamentally in his lacking such a form altogether, so that physical images inevitably distort. Moses warns, "Since you saw no form on the day that the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a graven image for yourselves, in the form of any figure. . . . if you act corruptly by making a graven image in the form of anything, . . . you will soon utterly perish from the land" (Dt 4:15–16, 25–26). God is not to be portrayed in paintings, in statuary, in any sort of visual image. For any sort of image, however beautiful, however artistically inspiring, will diminish who God is by portraying him in some necessarily limited, corporeal way.

2.1.5 Divine Spirituality

Fifth, God is described in Scripture as a spirit, which implies his immateriality. We need not be distracted by the vast range of meanings of the Hebrew and Greek words *rûaḥ* and *pneuma,* both translated as "spirit."[10]

[10] See the thorough treatment in Hermann Kleinknecht et al., "πνεῦμα, πνευματικός," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1968), 6: 332–451.

For our interest is not in the use of these words in a meteorological sense to designate the wind or in a biological sense to designate the breath or vital force of an animate, corporeal creature, but in a theo-anthropological sense to designate intellectual substances, that is, immaterial personal agents or spirits.

2.1.5.1 God as Spirit

In the Old Testament (OT) we find a dualism of flesh and spirit, such as comes to expression in Is 31.3:

> The Egyptians are men, and not God;
> and their horses are flesh, and not spirit.

Here the focus seems to be on the weakness and vulnerability of material things in contrast to God.[11] It is significant that although *rûaḥ* is often used to refer to God (136 times in the OT), *bāśār* ("flesh") is never used of God.[12] As the Creator of the material realm, God is not flesh and has power over things of flesh. According to Eduard Schweizer, from the time of Is 31.3 the divine realm was characterized in Hellenistic Judaism by "*pneuma*" and the human realm by "*sarks*." In the Hellenistic world this was understood as a distinction of substance.[13]

In the NT this same dualism of flesh and spirit is presupposed. It manifests itself in Jesus' logion "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mk 14.38). Again, Jesus says, "It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail" (Jn 6.63). In Luke's Gospel, when Jesus appears to the disciples after his resurrection, they "supposed that they saw a spirit," which draws Jesus' reply, "a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have" (Lk 24.37, 39). This dualism of flesh and spirit plausibly forms the backdrop of Paul's statement in Rom 1.3–4 that Christ "was descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness."

The biblical conception of spirit bears no relation or resemblance to the extra-biblical Greek notion of spirit as a thin material substance permeating the universe, epitomized in Stoicism. Kleinknecht observes that "The

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[11] Given the ancient Hebrews' lack of even a primitive physics, it is not implausible that the contrast between flesh and spirit just is, in the Hebrew idiom, the contrast between the material and the immaterial, for in the absence of some concept of matter, what other means presented itself for drawing the distinction? Certainly ancient Hebrews could conceive of material objects which are not fleshly, so that being fleshly is sufficient for materiality but not necessary; nevertheless, how could one express the distinction between the material and the immaterial more effectively and idiomatically? In any case, regardless of this conjecture, what seems clear is that being a spirit is sufficient for immateriality.

[12] Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 26; cf. 32. It is from Wolff that I borrow the characterization of *rûaḥ* as a theo-anthropological term.

[13] Schweizer, in Kleinknecht et al., "πνεῦμα, πνευματικός," 393, 416. Thus, he says, "the way is paved for thinking of the world of men as determined by corporeality and the world of God by incorporeality" (Eduard Schweizer, "Röm 1,3f. und der Gegensatz von Fleisch und Geist vor und bei Paulus," *Evangelische Theologie* 15 [1955]: 568).

constitutive factor of πνεῦμα in the Greek world is always its subtle and powerful corporeality. Because of its material character it is never spiritual in the strict sense, as in the NT. It is never wholly outside the realm of sense. . . . it is never set in antithesis to matter as the supernatural, wonder-working spiritual gift or manifestation of a transcendent personal God."[14] In biblical usage, by contrast, "spirit" connotes immateriality.

Our interest lies in the use of *rûaḥ* and *pneuma* with respect to human spirits, unembodied finite spirits, and preeminently the divine Spirit. Without allowing ourselves to be distracted by the question whether anthropological dualism is the biblical view,[15] we may note simply in passing that in the OT the *rûaḥ* in man is the seat of states of mental awareness that dualists would attribute to the mind, such as emotions, intellectual functions, rational and religious perception, and the dispositions and actions of the will.[16] As such there is an overlap of terminology with the heart (Heb. *lēb*) and the soul (Grk. *psychē*), to which such mental states are also attributed.[17] Disembodied human souls after the death of the body are referred to as spirits (I En 10.15; 20.3, 6; 22.5–7; Jub 23.31; Acts 23.8–9; Heb 12.23).

More directly relevant to our concern is the use of *rûaḥ* and *pneuma* to designate unembodied spirits. These are invisible, independent spirit beings other than God, including angels, demons, and other *elohim*. Though they can assume bodily form, that is not their natural estate. Scripture refers to such spirits as divine beings (*elohim*) or sons of God (Gen 6.1–4; Dt 32.7; Ps 82.1–7; 89.5–7; Job 1.6–12; 38.4–7; I Kg 22.19–22; cf. I En 15.3–7; 61.12–13). Of the angels, the writer of Hebrews asks, "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve?" (Heb 1.14). John calls angels spirits (Rev 1.4). Demons are sometimes referred to as "unclean spirits" (Mt 8.16; 10.1; 12.43–45; Mk 1.23–27; 3.11; 5.2–13; 7.25; 9.25; Lk 4.33; 6.18; Rev 16.13) or as "evil spirits" (Lk 8.2; Acts 19.15–16). These spirit beings are differenced from God in that they belong to the created order and are finite in every respect.[18]

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[14] Kleinknecht et al., "πνεῦμα, πνευματικός," 357–358.

[15] To be taken up in the locus *De homine*.

[16] Kleinknecht et al., "πνεῦμα, πνευματικός," 361–362. According to Bieder, the spirit "is the seat of all the functions of the soul" (Kleinknecht et al., 369). Wolff is emphatic: "It is impossible to exaggerate the distance that separates 'breath' from 'spirit' as the organ of knowledge, understanding, and judgment," for the latter usage designates one's "state of mind" (Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament,* 36, 37).

[17] Wolff points out that various "states of mind and mood" are ascribed to *nepeš,* which, in contrast to *bāśār*, "is applied to God in at least a bare three per cent of its occurrences in the Old Testament" (Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament,* 18, 26). Similarly, *lēb* "includes everything that we ascribe to the head and the brain – power of perception, reason, understanding, insight, consciousness, memory, knowledge, reflection, judgment, sense of direction, discernment" (51).

[18] Bavinck therefore errs, I think, in considering God's spirituality to be different in kind from that of finite spirit beings. While recognizing "God's spirituality" to be "a term for his *incorporeal substance*," Bavinck writes,

By contrast, the Spirit of God is not an angelic being or finite heavenly being. He is never present in the heavenly assembly before the throne of God.[19] Although *rûaḥ* and *pneuma* are frequently used to denote God's power which comes upon men, the words are also used hypostatically to refer to God himself as a personal agent. Even in the OT "the Spirit of the LORD," the supernatural source of prophetic utterance, is not an impersonal power. Baumgärtel explains, "Classical prophecy. . . lifted the divine רוּחַ out of religious and ethical neutrality, and understood it as the teleological will and work of personal divine power. יְהוָה רוּח [the Spirit of the LORD] is a term for the historical creative action of the one God which. . . is always God's action. Hence יְהוָה רוּח can be an expression for God's inner nature and presence."[20]

Kleinknecht explains that from the time of Wisdom and Philo, under Jewish and Christian influence, *pneuma* "is cut off from its basic relation to nature, transcendentally spiritualised, and hypostatised and personified as an independent, personally living and active cosmological and soteriological Spirit or God *sui generis*."[21] The appellation "Holy Spirit" is especially significant in this regard. Without being prematurely drawn into a discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity, we can say that the Holy Spirit in the NT is not an impersonal power but God himself, endowed with the properties of personhood, such as intellect and will.[22] Observing that the concept of a *pneuma hagion* is unattested in secular Greek literature, Kleinknecht asserts, "Here biblical Gk. has coined a new and distinctive expression for the very different, suprasensual, supraterrestrial and in part personal

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> "the spirituality of God is of a very different nature and unique in its kind. The term 'spirit,' when applied to God, angels, and souls, must not be understood univocally and synonymously but analogically. This is already evident from the fact that the spirit of angelic and human beings is composite in character, not, to be sure, in the sense that it is composed of elements of matter but in the sense that it is composed of 'substance' and 'accidents,' of 'potentiality' and 'act,' and is therefore subject to change. In God, however, this type of composition is no more present than that of bodily parts. He is pure being. . . . Thus the spirituality of God refers to that perfection of God that describes him, negatively, as being immaterial and invisible, analogously to the spirit of angels and the soul of humans; and positively, as the hidden, simple (uncompounded), absolute ground of all creatural, somatic, and pneumatic being" (Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols., ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003], 2:186).

Bavinck would thus, like Pannenberg (note 27 *infra*), saddle the defender of divine incorporeality with an extreme doctrine of divine simplicity. Divine simplicity in Bavinck's sense is not entailed by the meaning of *rûaḥ* or *pneuma,* nor is there any reason to think that finite spirits, in contrast to God, are metaphysically composed in the way that Bavinck imagines.

[19] As pointed out by Sjöberg in Kleinknecht et al., "πνεῦμα, πνευματικός," 387.

[20] Kleinknecht et al., 367.

[21] Kleinknecht et al., 339.

[22] Thus, Evans and Johnston's conclusion that "the Spirit of God is a power that transcends human power and all powers of creation" is sloppy, for the biblical evidence they survey makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is God himself, powerfully at work in creation, leadership, prophecy, etc. (Craig A. Evans and Jeremiah J. Johnston, "The Testimony of the Spirit in Biblical Literature," in *Testimony of the Spirit*, 52).

character and content which πνεῦμα has in Judaism and Christianity."[23] By contrast, "Profane Greek knows no hypostatic person of the Spirit understood as an independent divine entity. In the Greek world πνεῦμα is always regarded as a thing, never as a person."[24]

So in the NT the Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force but God himself. Most famous and direct are the words ascribed to Jesus: "God is Spirit" (Jn 4.24).[25] In John's Gospel the Holy Spirit is a personal agent who instructs the apostles and of whom masculine personal pronouns may be used, despite *pneuma*'s being a neuter noun (Jn 14.17, 26; 15.26; 16.13). The Spirit continues to speak to the church of John's day (Rev 2.7, 11, 17, 29; 3.6, 13; 3. 22; 14.13; 22.17). Paul in II Cor 3.17–18 identifies the Spirit with the person referred to as "the LORD" in Ex 34.34. In Luke–Acts, the Holy Spirit is similarly a personal agent who employs first-person indexicals, for example, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13.2), indeed, who is God himself (Lk 2.26; Acts 1.16; 5.3–4, 32; 8.29; 10.19; 11.12; 15.28; 16.6, 7; 20.23; 21.11; 28.25). The Holy Spirit speaks to us in Scripture, as we have seen (Lk 12.12; Acts 1.16; 28.25; Heb 3.7; 9.8; 10.15).[26] He is placed on a par with the Father and the Son (Mt 28.19; II Cor 13.14). In sum, God's being a spirit implies his incorporeality.[27]

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[23] Kleinknecht et al., "πνεῦμα, πνευματικός," 338. He adds, "An expression of this kind was bound to remain alien to the immanentist thinking of the Greek world" (338).

[24] Kleinknecht et al., 359.

[25] Johannine commentators variously characterize the meaning of "God is Spirit" as "different from all that is earthly and human. . . . it expresses the transcendence and holiness of God" (Rudolf Schnackenberg, *The Gospel according to St. John*, trans. Kevin Smyth [New York: Herder and Herder, 1968], 1:139); "not corporeal in the human sense" (C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 2nd ed. [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978], 238); "invisible, divine as opposed to human (cf. 3:6), life-giving and unknowable to human beings unless he chooses to reveal himself" (D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1991], 225); "spiritual but not physical" (Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John,* 2 vols. [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003], 1:619); "spiritual rather than material being" (Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004], 146); "invisible (1:18; 6:46), incorruptible, not to be worshiped in the form of idols or images" (J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2010], 253). Of course, Jn 4.24 "is not merely a commonplace explanation about the incorporeality of God. Jesus . . . is describing something of the dynamic and life-giving character of God" (Gary M. Burge, *John*, NIV Application Commentary [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000], 147), but John affirms nothing less than divine incorporeality.

[26] Recall our discussion in this *Systematic Philosophical Theology*, vol I: *De Scriptura sacra*.

[27] Pannenberg's position on God's spirituality is deeply problematic (Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994], I:370–384). He apparently wants to deny as unacceptably anthropomorphic the idea that God is a self-conscious and, in that sense, personal being (I:370–371). What content, then, can be given to the idea of divine spirituality? Acknowledging that Paul and John agree that God is *pneuma*, Pannenberg claims that "this idea did not as yet bear any relation to the concept of God as *nous* which was common in Middle Platonism and which Philo had adopted" (1:371), a claim that we have seen to be false. Citing Wolff, Pannenberg says that *rûaḥ* "does not mean reason or consciousness," which are located in the heart, but rather "is a mysteriously invisible natural force which declares itself especially in movement of the wind" (I:373). As we have seen, this statement is a serious misrepresentation both of Wolff (cf. note 17 *supra*) and of the biblical linguistic evidence. Pannenberg believes that "the penetration of the narrower conception of *pneuma* as a rational soul and consciousness into Christian theology is connected with the rise of the Platonic school in the third century and the decision of Christian theology in favor of the Platonic transcendental view of God rather than Stoic pantheism" (I:374). Once more, this claim is historically incorrect (see Kleinknecht et al., "πνεῦμα, πνευματικός," 354, 358).

2.1.5.2 Bodily Descriptions and Appearances of God

What, then, shall we say about Scripture's abundant use of bodily descriptions of God? Such descriptions fall into two quite distinct categories.[28] On the one hand there are passages describing God anthropomorphically. Such descriptions are common in the Psalms. For example:

> In my distress I called upon the LORD;
> to my God I cried for help.

Pannenberg notes Origen's incisive critique of divine corporeality in *On First Principles* I.1.1–7, a critique that Pannenberg apparently accepts but thinks does not go far enough. He says, "the Achilles' heel of Origen's argument" was "that he had to take metaphorically all the biblical statements that ascribe bodily features to God but literally (*proprie*) those that refer to him as a rational being, even though they may be ascribed to him only in the mode of undivided unity" (Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, I:372). Pannenberg apparently takes Origen's affirmation that God is "an uncompounded intellectual nature" (*simplex intellectualis natura*) (I.1.6) to be an affirmation of the doctrine of divine simplicity that eventually comes to expression in Aquinas, which Pannenberg takes to rule out God's being a personal, self-conscious being. But Origen's burden in this section is to repudiate the notion that God is compounded of physical parts, not to affirm that God has no properties or that God is identical to his properties, ideas which are, indeed, notoriously difficult to square with God's being a person (see *infra*, chap. 5). More fundamentally, however, if that were Origen's view, why not repudiate the strong doctrine of divine simplicity instead of the biblical doctrine that God is a personal being?

Pannenberg blames early Christian theology for not following Plotinus in pressing "beyond the view of God as *nous* to the thought of God as the One, the problem with *nous* being that it is related to the other that it knows, and it cannot, therefore, itself be the final unity" (*Systematic Theology*, I:374). Here he alludes to Fichte's argument that a God who is infinite cannot be in any way limited. Fichte argued that since a self-consciousness implies something beyond itself from which it distinguishes itself, we cannot conceive of it apart from limitation and finitude, thereby making God a finite being like ourselves (I:376). But not only does it seem bizarre to say that a God who is self-conscious is thereby limited by something else, the Fichtean claim that the infinite is unlimited is false, and Pannenberg's acceptance of it steers him into pantheism (see my "Pantheists in Spite of Themselves? Pannenberg, Clayton, and Shults on Divine Infinity," *American Theological Inquiry* 5 [2012]: 3–23, http://www.atijournal.org/Vol5No1.htm).

In response to Richard Swinburne's defense of God as an incorporeal mind, Pannenberg offers this disappointing rejoinder:

> "The efforts of modern analytical philosophy of religion. . . to show the possibility of a reason that exists independently of a body [*einer unabhängig von der Bindung an einen Leib existierenden Vernunft*], no matter how successful one might judge them to be, hardly touch upon the real difficulties in the idea of a divine reason [*einer göttlichen Vernunft*]. These lie in the fact that it demands so many changes in the phenomenon of reason as we know it [*des uns vertrauten Phänomens menschlicher Vernunft*] that it [*die Vorstellung einer göttlichen Venunft*] can have no more than metaphorical significance" (*Systematic Theology*, I:379).

Pannenberg evidently means by *eine Vernunft* a mind, whether divine or human. The difficulties he speaks of in the idea of a divine mind are presumably those occasioned by a strong doctrine of divine simplicity (which, ironically, Swinburne rejects). Whatever changes such a strong doctrine would demand, Pannenberg has failed to show that such a doctrine is in fact required; certainly his Fichtean argument fails to justify such a doctrine.

In the end, Pannenberg appeals to quantum field theory in order to construe the Holy Spirit as an impersonal field (*Systematic Theology*, I:382–383). Not only is such a view alien to the NT, but, *pace* Pannenberg, quantum fields are physical in nature and therefore do not present a third option between Stoic materialism and Platonic *nous*. As David Albert explains, according to relativistic quantum field theories, "the concrete, fundamental, eternally persisting elementary physical stuff of the world," consists, not of material particles, "but (unsurprisingly) of relativistic quantum fields," and "particles are to be understood, rather, as specific arrangements of the fields" (David Albert, "On the Origin of Everything," review of *A Universe from Nothing: Why There Is Something Rather Than* Nothing, by Lawrence M. Krauss, *New York Times,* March 23, 2012, *Sunday Book Review*). Once again, for Pannenberg Stoic pantheism looms.

[28] Distinguished by John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 220–222.

> From his temple he heard my voice,
> and my cry to him reached his ears.
> Then the earth reeled and rocked;
> the foundations also of the mountains trembled
> and quaked, because he was angry.
> Smoke went up from his nostrils,
> and devouring fire from his mouth;
> glowing coals flamed forth from him.
> He bowed the heavens, and came down;
> thick darkness was under his feet.
> He rode on a cherub, and flew;
> he came swiftly upon the wings of the wind (Ps 18.6–10).

Here God is described by the Psalmist as a fire-breathing humanoid who rides on the cherubim through the clouds. Such anthropomorphisms are pervasive in Scripture. It is not simply that bodily parts are attributed to God; even actions like God's seeing the distress of his people or God's hearing their cry are anthropomorphic, since if taken literally they require that God have eyeballs that receive photons and so give him visual images of things and eardrums on which sound waves can impinge so that he can hear the cries of his people.

On the other hand there are biblical passages describing divine theophanies, God's manifesting himself to human beings in bodily form. For example, when Moses asks to see the glory of God, Yahweh accedes to his request.

> 'But,' he said, 'you cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live.' And the LORD said, 'Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand upon the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen' (Ex 33.20–23).

Here God describes himself in very human terms as having a face and hands and even a back that Moses can see.

With respect to the first category of texts, in light of the scriptural data that imply that God is not a material object, we should understand anthropomorphic descriptions of God to be figurative rather than literal. Two considerations support this understanding.

First, these descriptions serve a clear literary purpose. A good example is I Pet 3.12: "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those

that do evil." Clearly, it would be inept to try to interpret such a passage literally; that somehow the eyeballs of God are resting on top of the righteous people or that the face of the Lord is up against those that do evil. Clearly the eyes and the ears and the face of the Lord here are meant as literary figures of speech. When the Scriptures speak of God's eyes, they are speaking of God's knowledge and regard. When the Scriptures speak of God's ears, his attentiveness to certain persons is meant. When they speak of God's face, they are referring to his presence. When they speak of God's arm, they are speaking of God's power. All of these corporeal descriptions have a clear literary purpose. The fact that such descriptions should not be taken literally is reinforced by the poetic context in which they often appear. I Pet 3.12 is drawn from Ps 34, which also speaks of tasting the LORD's goodness and taking refuge in him. Ps 18, quoted above, describes the earth as rocking and reeling and the mountains as trembling.

Second, if we were to take such anthropomorphic descriptions of God literally, then they would be mutually inconsistent. For God is differently described in these passages. In some passages, God is described in very human terms but in others with wings or breathing fire (Ps 17.8; 18.8; 57.1; 91.4). Therefore it is obvious that we should understand these anthropomorphic descriptions of God in a metaphorical way rather than a literal way.

What, then, about the theophanies? Such cases are often plausibly taken to be visions, mental projections of the percipient's mind, even though caused by God. In the above-cited case, God seems to provide Moses with a vision, causing him to project a mental image of God, that conveys to him a sense of God's glory. Another such example would be Isaiah's vision of God in his glory in the Temple:

> In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said:
>
> 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
> the whole earth is full of his glory' (Is 6.1–3).

Here God's holiness is manifested in a corporeal vision of God upon a throne, a manifestation of God's holiness that causes Isaiah to feel conviction of his own sin and inadequacy.

Visions of this sort are very common in the Bible. Acts provides several examples. For instance, we have Peter's vision of a sheet being lowered from heaven that is filled with various kinds of animals:

> And he became hungry and desired something to eat; but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heaven opened, and something descending, like a great sheet, let down by four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' But Peter said, 'No, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.' And the voice came to him again a second time, 'What God has cleansed, you must not call common.' This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven (Acts 10.10–16).

Obviously, this is not a case of a literal seeing of a sheet full of animals in the external world that other people passing by Simon's house would have seen coming down from heaven. Peter was in a trance when he saw this. Therefore, we should not think that this involves a huge tarpaulin of some sort filled with clean and unclean animals jostling with one another and trying to maintain their balance as this sheet is being lowered and raised. This is a mental projection that God has caused Peter to have to teach him a lesson about clean and unclean, preparing him for proclaiming the Gospel to Cornelius and his household, who would be regarded by Jews as unclean and therefore not worthy to receive the Gospel.

Acts 7 provides a more relevant example. We have here Stephen's vision of the exalted Christ as the Son of Man:

> But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.' But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon him (Acts 7.55–57).

Again, this was a purely private vision that Stephen alone enjoyed. The people standing around saw nothing. Its visionary character is also evident in the fact that he sees the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God, which is itself an anthropomorphic description of God's sitting on a throne that serves a literary purpose, namely, Jesus' exaltation to a position of authority. Stephen's vision is not therefore reckoned among the resurrection appearances of Christ. Rather than a resurrection appearance story, we have here a vision story. It plausibly concerns a vision of the exalted Christ that God caused Stephen to project.

Finally, consider Paul's own account of his experience of seeing Christ in the Temple. Christ's earlier appearance to Paul on the Damascus Road, though semi-visionary in nature, involved extra-mental phenomena apprehended by his traveling companions. But after his baptism, "When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance and saw him saying to me, 'Make haste and get quickly out of Jerusalem, because they will not accept your testimony about me'" (Acts 22.17). Here Paul is in an entranced state and has a vision of Jesus warning him to get out of the city. This is not a second resurrection appearance to Paul. Rather it is an entranced vision of Christ for the purpose of warning Paul to escape. These kinds of visionary experiences, as mental projections of the percipient, do not imply that God has a body or is a material object.

Nonetheless, there are theophanies that do not seem to be merely visionary experiences. In these cases we do seem to have a temporary physical manifestation of God or a finite spiritual being for the sake of interacting with human actors.[29] A noteworthy example is God's appearance to Abraham related in Gen 18. That this is a special theophany rather than God's normal state is evident in the opening words, "And the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre" (v. 1). Although the three visitors whom Abraham entertains could be merely visionary, the more natural explanation, in view of his providing a meal, which they then eat, is that they were physically present. Presumably the meat, bread, and milk he saw them consume (v. 8) were gone after their departure. Moreover, Sarah took part in the experience as well (vv. 9–15).

Similarly, although Jacob's experience at Bethel, related in Gen 28, in which he sees both angels and the LORD, is doubtless merely intra-mental, being described as a dream (vv. 12–13), Jacob's mysterious nocturnal encounter with a man at Peniel, recounted in Gen 32, seems quite different. For in this case we have enduring extra-mental effects after the experience.

> When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and Jacob's thigh was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, 'Let me go, for the day is breaking.' But Jacob said, 'I will not let you go, unless you bless me.' And he said to him, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Jacob.' Then he said, 'Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men,

[29] The difficulty of interpretation here is occasioned by ancient Judaism's use of extremely exalted language for angelic beings, as documented by Larry W. Hurtado, "Principal Angels," chap. 7 in *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*, 3rd ed. (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015). A particular figure such as the angel of the LORD can be described in terms that threaten to assimilate him to God, even though, as God's chief agent, he is a creaturely being. I shall assume for the sake of argument that we are here dealing with theophanies, not angelophanies.

> and have prevailed.' Then Jacob asked him, 'Tell me, I pray, your name.' But he said, 'Why is it that you ask my name?' And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, 'For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.' The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his thigh.

That the human stranger is, indeed, God is suggested by his sovereignly changing Jacob's name to "Israel," which means *he who strives with God*, his refusing to disclose his own name, his blessing Jacob, and Jacob's naming the place Peniel, meaning *the face of God*. The non-visionary character of the encounter is evident in the permanent impairment of Jacob's hip. The encounter shows, not that God has a human body, much less is a material object, but that he can manifest himself corporeally should he so wish.

In sum, neither anthropomorphic descriptions of God nor theophanies of God in human form serve to subvert the teaching of Scripture that God is immaterial. Given God's transcendence of the world, his omnipresence, his invisibility, the prohibition of divine images, and his spirituality, we have solid scriptural basis for affirming God's incorporeality.

2.2 Natural and Perfect Being Theology

Moreover, the arguments of natural theology and perfect being theology reinforce the scriptural data supporting divine incorporeality.[30] In order to see why, it will be helpful to explicate more clearly the distinction between the material (or physical) and the immaterial (or non-physical). Although the characterization of the material is much discussed without consensus, I see no reason that the material should not be straightforwardly characterized as that which is composed of or constituted by matter and energy.[31]

[30] On the relevance of natural theology and perfect being theology to divine incorporeality, see Charles Taliaferro, "Incorporeality," in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd ed., ed. Charles Taliaferro, Paul Draper, and Philip L. Quinn (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 293. Cf. Charles Taliaferro, *Consciousness and the Mind of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 9–11. Taliaferro emphasizes that the materialist cannot embrace traditional theistic arguments or perfect being theology, which is just another way of saying that if there are good theistic arguments and Perfect being theology is coherent, then we should reject materialism.

[31] This characterization leaves open what particular theory of matter and energy might prevail in current physics. Contemporary physics treats material particles as excitations of underlying quantum energy fields uniting various fundamental forces of nature (cf. note 27 *supra*). There is no objection to saying that the material is that reality described by current theories of physics, so long as our characterization is taken referentially or *de re* to pick out the same reality which a future physics might describe differently. This characterization is superior to characterizing the material as that which is spatially extended, since many anthropological dualists and some theists take the soul or God to be spatially extended though immaterial, or the immaterial as that which has states of mental awareness, since that would beg the question against property dualists who reject substance dualism.

Thus, materialism is the doctrine that everything is composed of or constituted by matter and energy.[32] The universe, broadly construed, is coextensive with the realm of matter and energy, so that anything that transcends the universe is immaterial.

2.2.1 Natural Theology

Although we shall have much more to say about the arguments of natural theology in the sequel,[33] for now we may note in passing that several of the classic theistic arguments imply that God is a transcendent and, hence, immaterial being. For example, the *argument from contingency* implies the existence of a metaphysically necessary being as the best answer to Leibniz's question, "Why is there something rather than nothing?" Insofar as material things seem to be contingent, the physical universe fails as a plausible candidate for a metaphysically necessary being, so that the necessary ground of contingent things must be found in a transcendent being that is itself immaterial. Again, the *kalām cosmological argument* based upon the beginning of the universe requires a cause of the universe that is beyond physical space and time and, hence, the Creator of all matter and energy. The immateriality of the Creator of the universe is implied not only by his creation of all matter and energy, but also by the philosophical arguments against the existence of an infinite temporal regress of events, since such arguments require a state of changelessness causally, if not temporally, prior to the beginning of the universe, a state that cannot be material, since physical stuff is never quiescent but constantly changing. Again, the *teleological argumen*t based upon the fine-tuning of the universe issues in a transcendent Designer of the universe who has the power to set all the fundamental constants and quantities of the natural laws governing the material world. Such a cosmic Designer cannot himself be subject to such laws of nature, short of being a *causa sui*, since he determines their values and is

[32] I am surprised that Robin Collins should claim that "energy is itself not a sort of real stuff nor even an intrinsic property of a physical system. The reason is that the amount of energy a particle possesses is dependent on the frame of reference in which it is measured" (pre-print of Robin Collins, "Modern Physics and the Energy-Conservation Objection to Mind-Body Dualism," *American Philosophical* Quarterly 45, no. 1 (2008): 33–34, This claim not only gratuitously equates the real with the frame invariant, but would also imply that velocity, length, and duration are not real because they are relative to reference frames, which is surely implausible. Collins' characterization leads to Hilary Putnam's fallacious argument that because some event is real to you and you are real to me, the event is real to me, even though for you it is present relative to your reference frame and for me it is future relative to my reference frame. Understanding that *real to* is a triadic relation involving a reference frame subverts transitivity without denying that persons and events are real though reference frame dependent. I am not endorsing Einstein's original physical interpretation of special relativity, which involved reference frames and 3D objects enduring through time (I am a neo-Lorentzian), but that is the interpretation presupposed by Collins in his speaking of reference frames.

[33] In this *Systematic Philosophical Theology*, vol. IIb, Excursus on Natural Theology.

in that sense beyond them. His immateriality seems the best explanation of his transcending the laws of nature. Again, the *argument from the applicability of mathematics* in describing the physical world implies the existence of a transcendent Mind who created the physical world on the mathematical blueprint he had in mind. The unexpected applicability of mathematics in describing the material world requires a Mind that is itself not material, on pain of vicious circularity. Again, the *argument from consciousness* holds that our existence as self-conscious subjects requires that we are embodied, immaterial substances and that the existence of such selves has a better fit with a supernaturalist rather than naturalist worldview. For the existence of finite, immaterial selves is more explicable if there exists a transcendent, immaterial Self who created us and the world. For that reason naturalists are themselves almost universally anthropological monists or materialists. Again, even the *axiological argument* from the objectivity of moral and aesthetic values plausibly requires an ultimate paradigm of Goodness and Beauty that is not a material object, for no such object seems an appropriate bearer of intrinsic value. In particular, it is hard to conceive how any material object could be identified as Goodness itself, unless persons are material objects. Here we see the confluence of arguments from consciousness with axiological arguments. Finally, the *ontological argument* for a maximally great being necessitates that a being exhibiting maximal greatness is immaterial. For material objects are subject to all sorts of limitations which preclude their being maximally great.

2.2.2 Perfect Being Theology

The mention of the ontological argument forms a nice segue to perfect being theology, which affirms that God is a perfect being. Many of the divine attributes, to be discussed below, plausibly imply God's incorporeality. We have already mentioned *necessary existence* in the context of the argument from contingency. Regardless of the success of that argument, if a maximally great being exists necessarily, since necessary existence is evidently a great-making property, then God must possess necessary existence. To the degree that material things are inevitably contingent, it follows that God must be immaterial. Similarly, divine *aseity* seems to require God's immateriality, since material things have causes of their existence. Even given the eternity of matter and energy, material objects do not seem to have the sort of independence to changing conditions, especially in their internal constitution, that would allow them to exist self-sufficiently. If God just is the material universe as whole, as pantheists believe, one might maintain that God exists *a se*. But then God will plausibly lack others

of the divine attributes, such as omniscience and goodness, and so not be maximally great. Again, if God is *simple* in even a weak sense, he cannot be a material object, since material objects are composed of things like molecules and fundamental particles. Perhaps God could himself be a fundamental particle; but then it seems incredible that such a thing could be, for example, omniscient, omnipotent, and personal, in which case he would not be maximally great. Similarly, it seems incredible that a material object could be *omniscient*. Even if we are not substance dualists, a material object like a brain would have to be infinite in size and complexity to be the seat of infinite knowledge, and it is evident that no such object, including the universe, exists. So if God is omniscient, as a maximally great being must be, he is immaterial. Similarly, no material object could be *omnipotent*, for material objects are limited in their powers by their spatiality and material constitution. A material object could not, for example, transcend space and time, as God can. A material object, like the universe, could be *eternal* in the sense of existing throughout all time, but it could not be eternal in the sense of timeless. A material being might be *omnipresent* in the sense that it fills all space, but then it is extremely difficult to see how it could be wholly present at every point of space. A material object could be the paradigm of various physical properties, like *being a meter long*, but could a material object be the paradigm of *goodness*, as God is? I have already expressed skepticism about such a view. It is evident from this brief review that the divine attributes are mutually reinforcing, such that a material object's possession of one such attribute precludes its possession of another. Thus, perfect being theology requires divine incorporeality as one of the attributes of God.

The above bears out the truth of T. L. S. Sprigge's comment that while it "is not true that to be an atheist is to be a materialist. . . in effect to be a materialist is to be an atheist."[34]

2.3 The Coherence of Divine Incorporeality

What objections, then, might be raised against divine incorporeality? This question intersects significantly discussions in the philosophy of mind. In order to set the scene for our discussion, let us draw some distinctions standard among philosophers of mind.

[34] T. L. S. Sprigge, *Theories of Existence* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1985), 35, cited by Taliaferro, *Consciousness*, 2.

2.3.1 Dualism and Physicalism

Three broad schools of thought vie against one another concerning the reality of immaterial minds: idealism, which holds that all reality, including apparently physical objects, is mental; dualism, which holds that both immaterial mental substances and physical substances exist; and materialism or physicalism, which holds that there are no immaterial mental substances and, hence, only physical causes.[35] Although idealism persists in contemporary philosophy, it is unfashionable; materialism is the majority view today, especially with respect to sentient biological organisms, including human beings.

Materialism or physicalism comes in two significantly different varieties: reductive and non-reductive physicalism. Reductive physicalism may be either eliminative or non-eliminative materialism. Eliminative materialism is the more radical view, denying that states of mental awareness like thoughts are in any sense real. People on this view do not really have thoughts. Non-eliminative materialism concedes that people and animals do have states of mental awareness but identifies such allegedly mental states with brain states, so that, for example, a pain is nothing more than the firing of certain neurons in the brain. Reductive physicalism, whether eliminative or non-eliminative, though once very popular, is increasingly disfavored today because it fails to take account of the obvious differences between brain states, which may be fully described from a neutral, third-person standpoint, and phenomenal states of awareness, which involve a subjective or first-person viewpoint.[36] Non-reductive physicalism is the preferred view among materialists today, the view that although mental states are real, they are nonetheless properties of the brain. Because of its commitment to the reality of mental states, non-reductive physicalism is often taken to be a kind of dualism, specifically, property dualism.[37] That is

[35] We need to be careful not to equate immaterial substances with minds, since abstract objects, if they exist, may also count as immaterial substances, even though they are causally impotent. A naturalist like W. V. O. Quine was deeply committed to the reality of abstract objects even though he repudiated anthropological dualism.

[36] See Robert C. Koons and George Bealer, eds., The *Waning of Materialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Robert Audi reports, "Most of the leading views in the philosophy of mind are either not materialist at all or non-reductively so" (Robert Audi, "Theism and the Scientific Understanding of the Mind," in Taliaferro, Draper, and Quinn, *Philosophy of Religion*, 563). Dean Zimmerman declares, "Those who, like myself, find property dualism utterly compelling – independently of any reason to accept a dualism of soul and body – will not be overly impressed by objections to substance dualism that take aim at property dualism" (Dean Zimmerman, "Three Introductory Questions," in *Persons: Human and Divine*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007], 14).

[37] Note, however, that according to Zimmerman "'Property dualism'. . . , more and more frequently, . . . is used simply to mean the denial of physicalism either because there are brutely mental powers or properties that interact with the physical world. . . or because global supervenience fails – that is, because the complete description of the universe in the terms of fundamental (ideal) physics is compatible with a different

to say, even though there are no mental substances in addition to physical substances, there are irreducible mental properties which some physical substances have.[38] But given its denial of mental substances, this view is more accurately characterized as a kind of physicalism, not dualism, even if it represents a concession to dualism. Because there are no mental substances, a consistent non-reductive physicalist maintains that the states of mental awareness possessed by certain physical substances are causally effete, so that all causal influences are physical.

On the contemporary scene, anthropological dualism is a well-represented minority position in the philosophy of mind.[39] In a theological context anthropological dualism takes the form of body/soul dualism, according to which a human being is a composite of a rational soul and body. Whether human persons just are souls which happen to be embodied or whether human persons are composed of soul and body as essential and contingent parts is an in-house question among dualists. On theism God is a sort of soul or mental substance distinct from the physical world.

Physicalism of any variety is obviously incompatible with divine incorporeality, since God is an immaterial mental substance who is causally connected to the world. Accordingly, if there were good arguments for physicalism, we should have good reason to reject divine incorporeality. But here caution is in order, for divine incorporeality does not obviously entail anthropological dualism. There are on the contemporary scene plenty of anthropological monists, or physicalists, who are Christian theists who affirm divine incorporeality.[40] Thus, arguments against anthropological dualism do not obviously commit one to a denial of divine incorporeality.

This distinction is highly significant because the most important and widely accepted arguments against anthropological dualism are

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distribution of mental properties" ("Three Introductory Questions," 16). Substance dualism implies property dualism, but "Property dualists who are substance materialists believe that the mental and physical attributes of persons are independent in something like the way color and shape are; nevertheless, they believe that they are attributes of a single thing. . . consisting entirely of ordinary matter" (16).

[38] We should not infer from such property-talk that the property dualist thinks of properties as abstract objects. What the so-called property dualist is really talking about is property instances or tropes, in this case concrete mental states. Even then his talk may not be metaphysically heavyweight. Plantinga suggests, "A materialist might take a leaf from those who accept 'adverbial' accounts of sensation, according to which there aren't any red sensations or red sense data or red appearances: what there are instead are cases of someone's sensing redly or being appeared to redly. Similarly, the materialist might claim that there isn't any such thing as the belief that all men are mortal (or any other beliefs); what there is instead are cases of people who believe in the all-men-are-mortal way" (Alvin Plantinga, "Materialism and Christian Belief," in van Inwagen and Zimmerman, *Persons*, 109). Cf. the apropos comments of Roderick Chisholm, "On the Observability of the Self," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 30, no. 1 (1969): 8.

[39] See, for example, the articles *pro* and *contra* collected in *The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism,* ed. Jonathan J. Loose, Angus J. L. Menuge, and J. P. Moreland (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018).

[40] For example, Peter van Inwagen, Trenton Merricks, Nancey Murphy, Lynne Rudder Baker, Kevin Corcoran, etc.

scientific in nature, what Dean Zimmerman aptly calls "Ockhamist objections" to dualism, to wit, the soul or mind is not needed to account for the empirical data of the cognitive sciences, rendering the hypothesis of the soul dispensable.[41] Now whatever one thinks of such Ockhamist objections to anthropological dualism,[42] they are obviously inapplicable to theism because God is not related to the world as soul is to body,[43] much less have we any scientific data about the workings of God's mind in relation to the cosmos!

What we need to consider, then, are arguments for physicalism that are not scientific in nature but would have application to God as an immaterial mental substance distinct from and causally active in the world. This is a welcome relief, for it prevents our being sucked into the black hole of the literature on the mind/body problem. We can set aside for now as irrelevant Ockhamist objections to anthropological dualism and even forego the positive arguments of substance dualists for anthropological dualism. Of course, if those arguments are sound, so much the better for theism! But we have good scriptural reasons for thinking God to be incorporeal. That is where we as Christian theologians begin. Our question is thus sharply delimited: what arguments are there that God cannot be incorporeal? There are such arguments, but they are much fewer in number than the arguments against anthropological dualism.

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[41] Zimmerman, "Three Introductory Questions," 13–14. For examples of such objections, see William G. Lycan, "Redressing Substance Dualism," in Loose, Menuge, and Moreland, *Companion to Substance Dualism,* 22–40; Ian Ravenscroft, "Why Reject Substance Dualism?," in Loose, Menuge, and Moreland, *Companion to Substance Dualism,* 267–282.

[42] For a recent discussion of Ockhamist objections, see Brandon Rickabaugh and J. P. Moreland, *The Substance of Consciousness: A Comprehensive Defense of Contemporary Substance Dualism* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2024), chap. 10.

[43] This is as good a place as any to ask if the parallelism of soul-body and God-world relations suggests that the world is the body of God and God the soul of the world. On the one hand, God's actions in the world are like the basic actions we undertake in our bodies. In a basic action we do not perform some action by means of undertaking to do something else; rather we undertake to perform some action immediately, as when I will to raise my arm. Just as I can perform basic actions with respect to my body, so God can by merely willing bring about effects in the world. The world is, as it were, the instrumental equivalent of God's body. Is the analogy so entire as to suggest that although God has created the world *ex nihilo*, it nonetheless has come to embody him? It seems not. For the crucial disanalogy between the world and the body is that the world does not function for God either as a material substratum of consciousness or as a sense organ through which he perceives the external world. According to anthropological dualism, our souls, while embodied, are somehow and in some respects dependent upon our bodily states as a physical grounding for consciousness and as a means of perceiving reality outside ourselves. But nothing comparable to this is true in God's case. The human brain is the most complex structure in the universe, and there is nothing in the physical world which could serve as a substratum for an omniscient Mind. Moreover, God's knowledge, as we shall see in our discussion of divine eternity, should not be construed along the lines of perception. In short, while the soul-body relation works nicely as an analogy for God-world relations in an active sense, it is not analogous in the passive sense.

2.3.2 Physicalist Objections to Divine Incorporeality

So what objections have physicalists offered against substance dualism that would be applicable to God? Moreland and Rickabaugh consider three such objections.[44]

2.3.2.1 The Problem of Causal Interaction

Doubtless the most important non-scientific objection to substance dualism is that it posits a causal connection between mind and matter that is utterly mysterious.[45] We have no understanding how a non-physical substance could have physical causal effects. The objection thus presents a challenge to dualism-interactionism, the view that the mind and body are causally interactive.

The problem of causal interaction would obviously not be a problem for idealist philosophers, for whom all reality is mental. For theistic idealists the world is, in effect, like a dream in the mind of God, and everything that happens in it is sustained by God's thinking. Were he to unthink it, the world would vanish in an instant. So radical a solution to the problem, however, one that treats the material world as basically illusory, is hardly a promising way to handle it, since the solution to the problem seems no more plausible than the problematic view itself. In any case, the idealist solution does not sit well theologically with the Judeo-Christian worldview, which affirms the value and, hence, reality of the material in its doctrines of creation, incarnation, and resurrection. Therefore, we should do well to take the duality of mind and material as real rather than a matter of mere appearance and see what might said in response to the problem of their causal interaction.

Moreland and Rickbaugh distinguish two issues with regard to the interaction problem. On the one hand, it may be a demand for some sort of mechanism between mental and physical entities in virtue of which they interact with one another. This demand is, however, inept, since the effect of the mind upon the body, on pain of embarking on an infinite regress, is taken by dualist-interactionists to be immediate, without any intervening causal linkage.

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[44] See also discussion of these three objections by Joel Archer, *The Problem of Divine Action in the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 13–18.

[45] According to Plantinga, "This objection is perhaps the most widely urged of all the objections against dualism; according to Churchland and Dennett it is widely thought conclusive" ("Materialism and Christian Belief," 129). His riposte, "This objection, even if the most widely accepted and respected of them all, should carry no weight with Christian theists" (129), though true, does nothing to defeat this ostensible defeater of Christian theism.

On the other hand, if the question is taken as simply an expression of skepticism that there could be such immediate causal connections, then the force of the objection can be easily exaggerated. Taliaferro finds the physicalist critic somewhat hard-pressed to provide evidence that the only causal relations possible are among physical objects.[46] After all, souls, in contrast to causally effete abstract objects like numbers, are concrete entities endowed with causal mental powers sufficient for effects like thoughts. Why not powers to affect the physical realm as well? The materialist cannot simply charge that evidence is completely lacking for mental/physical interaction, Taliaferro reminds us, for if we follow the precept of trusting appearances until we have strong reason otherwise, it seems that the mental and physical do interact.[47]

Keith Yandell explores and rejects various justifications of such skepticism, for example, that mind/body interaction would violate some supposedly necessary truth like: *Only like can affect like,* or *Only what is in space can affect what is in space,* or *Ultimate connections cannot be brute*. The above causal likeness principle is patently false, so that "anyone should be ashamed for basing criticisms of anything on it."[48] As for the spatiality principle, there is just no evident incoherence in stating that something which is non-spatial affects something that is spatial. Considerations from contemporary cosmology reinforce Yandell's point. There is no reason why something to which our 4D spacetime manifold is present but which exists at no spacetime point in it cannot causally affect things which do exist at various spacetime points. In fact, this is precisely what the initial cosmological singularity does. Granted, it, too, is a physical reality, if real at all, but it is not at all obvious that a God who transcends space and time could not act to produce effects in it. As for the no brute connections principle,

[46] Taliaferro, *Consciousness*, 221.

[47] Taliaferro, 222. Earlier Taliaferro had advocated approaching the philosophy of human nature by taking appearances seriously, trusting them until we have reason to distrust them. "When we do take appearances seriously, we take up . . . the first-person or subjective point of view, according to which there is a discernible feel or awareness we have as conscious beings of our own states and activities" (49). Such "a phenomenological approach to human nature supports the view that there are pains, beliefs, desires, and so on and that they are not identical with any of the physical properties proposed by materialists" (50). Part of such a phenomenology will be our awareness of the causal efficacy of our own decisions and volitions. Cf. Charles Taliaferro and Jil Evans, *Is God Invisible? An Essay on Religion and Aesthetics*, Cambridge Studies in Religion, Philosophy, and Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 54. Consider also Richard Swinburne's remark: "Once the thinker takes seriously this vast evident qualitative difference between inanimate things on the one hand, and animals and men on the other, two things will strike him about conscious experience. The first is the fairly evident fact that there is a continuity in experience. . . .The second thing is the fairly evident fact that conscious experience is causally efficacious. Our thoughts and feelings are not just phenomena caused by goings-on in the brain; they cause other thoughts and feelings and they make a difference to the agent's behaviour" (Richard Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997], 1).

[48] Keith Yandell, "A Defense of Dualism," *Faith and Philosophy* 12 (1995): 552.

Yandell points out that there can be irreducible physical laws connecting physical phenomena, and there is no reason why brute mental–physical connections should be objectionable, whereas brute physical–physical connections are not objectionable.

We might not agree with William Hasker that the problem of causal interaction "may well hold the all-time record for overrated objections to major philosophical positions," but its force should not be exaggerated.[49] Hasker is not alone in pointing out that one reason it is not decisive is that "all causal relationships involving physical bodies are at bottom conceptually opaque. We have no ultimate insight into the causal relations involved except to say, 'That's the way things are.'"[50] Philosopher of science Jeffrey Koperski demands, "Can anyone say how the Higgs field bestows mass on elementary particles? What precisely does the causal joint look like? Can anyone explain how an exchange of particles binds electrons to a nucleus? As every parent knows, eventually the right answer is simply 'that's just the way it is'."[51]

Perhaps the most powerful response by anthropological dualists to the present objection is to point out that we have good positive reasons to think that the soul is an immaterial substance that causally affects the body, even if we do not understand how.[52] Moreland and Rickabaugh point out that dualist entities like conscious states and the soul are not only entities of which we have direct acquaintance, but entities whose reality is supported by philosophical arguments from the unity of consciousness, the possibility of disembodied survival or body switches, the best view of an agent in support of libertarian agent causation, the metaphysical implications of the

[49] William Hasker, *The Emergent Self* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 150.

[50] Taliaferro muses, "Eventually all disputants will have to come to a point of claiming that things have certain powers without being able to offer a deeper account or that the physical interaction is accounted for by an infinite mysterious causal chain" (*Consciousness*, 223). Plantinga concurs, "True: we have little or no insight into how it is that an immaterial substance can cause changes in the physical world; but we have equally little insight into how it is that a material substance can cause changes in the physical world" ("Materialism and Christian Belief," 129). Uwe Meixner observes,

> "It is a curious fact of the history of philosophy that so many philosophers have complained about the incomprehensibility of non-physical mental causation of physical events, considering that most of the many philosophical conceptions of causation on offer (i.e., regularity theories, counterfactual theories, probabilistic theories) do not give any grounds for supposing that there is anything particularly incomprehensible about the non-physical causation of physical events. It should be noted that the principles of causal closure of the physical world – constantly invoked against the non-physical causation of the physical – are neither principles of the logic of causation nor principles of physics, but postulates of materialist metaphysics. As such, the closure principles are begging the very question which is at issue" ("New Perspectives for a Dualistic Conception of Mental Causation," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 15, no. 1 [2008]: 17).

[51] Jeffrey Koperski, "Breaking Laws of Nature," *Philosophia Christi* 19, no. 1 (2017): 97.

[52] Thus Hasker goes on to say, "equally, and emphatically, the 'way things are' includes the facts that our thoughts, feelings, and intentions are influenced by what happens to our bodies and vice versa; to deny these palpable facts for the sake of a philosophical theory seems a strange aberration" (*Emergent Self*, 150).

use of the indexical "I," and the special sort of diachronic and synchronic unity of human persons.[53]

Similarly, in considering physicalist objections to divine incorporeality, we must not forget that we have sound theistic arguments that support divine incorporeality. As we have mentioned, arguments such as the *kalām* cosmological argument, the teleological argument from the fine-tuning of the universe, and the argument from the uncanny applicability of mathematics in physics provide powerful reasons for thinking that there is a transcendent Mind who has created the universe. These arguments provide a strong cumulative case in support of divine incorporeality that may well outweigh the putative defeaters brought against the doctrine. In particular, they outweigh expressions of incredulity based on our ignorance of how the mental affects the physical.

In fact, it seems to me that the dualist-interactionist can turn the tables and argue cogently that the materialist claim that causal interaction is impossible is incapable of rational affirmation. I have reference here to Alvin Plantinga's celebrated Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism (EAAN).[54] Plantinga argues that naturalism is self-defeating because if our cognitive faculties have evolved by naturalistic processes, they are aimed, not at truth, but at survival, and so cannot be relied on to produce true beliefs. Because our mental states (assuming against the eliminative materialist that we have such states) have absolutely no effect on our brain states, the content of our beliefs is irrelevant to our survivability. All that matters is our physical behavior, not the truth of our beliefs. So long as we act in ways conducive to survival, it literally does not matter what we believe. But if we cannot rely on our cognitive faculties to produce true beliefs, then the belief in naturalism is itself undermined, since it has been produced by those very cognitive faculties.

We can formulate Plantinga's argument as follows:[55]

1. The probability that our cognitive faculties are reliable, given naturalism and evolution, is low.
2. If someone believes in naturalism and evolution and sees that, therefore, the probability of his cognitive faculties' being reliable is low, then he has a defeater for the belief that his cognitive faculties are reliable.

[53] Rickabaugh and Moreland, *Substance of Consciousness,* 286.

[54] According to Andrew Moon, Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism has become "the most discussed global debunking argument" today, where a global debunking argument is an argument that concludes that one has a defeater for all of one's beliefs (Andrew Moon, "Global Debunking Arguments," in *Evolutionary Debunking Arguments: Ethics, Philosophy of Religion, Philosophy of Mathematics, Metaphysics, and Epistemology,* ed. Diego E. Machuca [New York: Routledge, 2023), 305).

[55] For Plantinga's most recent recension see Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 344–345.

3. If someone has a defeater for the belief that his cognitive faculties are reliable, then he has a defeater for any belief produced by his cognitive faculties (including his belief in naturalism).
4. Therefore, if someone believes in naturalism and evolution and sees that, therefore, the probability of his cognitive faculties' being reliable is low, then he has a defeater for the reliability of his belief in naturalism.

EAAN, if sound, does not prove that naturalism is false but that it cannot be rationally affirmed. It is a self-defeating position.[56]

As Hasker perceptively recognized, EAAN is not so much an argument against naturalism as an argument against materialism.[57] If the naturalist were to embrace dualism-interactionism, he would be immune to the argument, despite his denial of supernatural realities like God. For though a naturalist, he would recognize the reality and causal efficacy of souls and, hence, their possible selective advantage in the evolutionary struggle for survival. In that case our belief states would be relevant to our survivability. Plantinga himself, in his most recent explication of EAAN, makes it clear that the real target is materialism. Observing that "nearly all naturalists are also materialists with respect to human beings,"[58] he asks what the likelihood is that the content of our beliefs is in fact true, "*given evolution and naturalism* (construed as including materialism about human beings)."[59] He then proceeds to explore the reasons for premise (1), first, on the assumption of reductive materialism and, second, on the assumption of non-reductive materialism.[60] Accordingly, "EAAN" is something of a misnomer; the argument is better called the Evolutionary Argument against Materialism (EAAM).

But even that new label is not quite correct. For many naturalists, most eminently W. V. O. Quine, are not materialists but embrace wholeheartedly the reality of immaterial abstract objects such as mathematical entities.[61] Despite their denial of materialism they would still be vulnerable to Plantinga's argument, since they deny that immaterial entities exert any causal

[56] Intriguingly, the materialist convinced by EAAN cannot reason himself out of materialism because, having been persuaded that his cognitive faculties are unreliable, he can no more believe the premises of Plantinga's argument than naturalism! His situation is therefore truly desperate. He can only recover or be delivered from materialism. As Plantinga so poignantly puts it, "There is no way to reason oneself out of such a predicament; here salvation will have to be by grace rather than works" (Alvin Plantinga, "Reply to Beilby's Cohorts," in *Naturalism Defeated?*, ed. James Beilby [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002], 230). For discussion see Moon, "Global Debunking Arguments," 309.

[57] Hasker, *Emergent Self*, 67–80. Recall that Hasker's book was published in 1999.

[58] Plantinga, *Conflict*, 318.

[59] Plantinga, 325.

[60] Plantinga, 326–333, 333–335.

[61] See my *God Over All*, 16, 45–46; cf. William Lane Craig, *God and Abstract Objects: The Coherence of Theism III: Aseity* (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 2017), 79–107.

influence on the world. As Hasker discerns, what Plantinga's argument is really about is the so-called causal closure of the physical (CCP).[62] As defined by philosopher of mind Jaegwon Kim, "This is the assumption that if we trace the causal ancestry of a physical event, we need never go outside the physical domain."[63] The closure principle requires that all physical events have only physical causes. If there do exist immaterial entities, they are irrelevant because of the causal closure of the physical domain. Materialists may embrace or deny the reality of mental states of awareness, but they all deny their causal efficacy in the material world. Plantinga's argument is therefore best cast as the Evolutionary Argument against the Causal Closure of the Physical (EAACCP).[64]

Plantinga's argument is thus directly relevant to the present objection based on the impossibility of causal interaction between the soul and body. If EAACCP is sound, then the materialist's claim cannot be rationally affirmed and collapses in self-defeat. Hasker wryly comments, "To say that this constitutes a serious problem for physicalism seems an understatement."[65]

Is EAACCP successful? Andrew Moon, whose careful analysis of debunking arguments we have already encountered in the locus *De fide*,[66] explains that the crucial question in assessing the success of Plantinga's argument is, "Which beliefs may the materialist legitimately use to respond to such a potential defeater?" The materialist might think that he can offer a defeater-defeater for Plantinga's defeater of the reliability of the materialist's cognitive faculties. He might, for example, invite us to just look around and see how reliable our and other animals' cognitive faculties are in navigating successfully the physical world. Unfortunately, Moon explains, the materialist, while engaging in such reasoning, would be employing the very cognitive faculties that he already has reason to distrust. In other words, any potential defeater-defeater will itself already be defeated by the original

[62] Hasker, *Emergent Self*, 59.

[63] Jaegwon Kim, "The Myth of Nonreductive Materialism," chap. 14 in *Supervenience and Mind: Selected Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 280.

[64] Cf. Plantinga's ruminations on the causal closure of the physical and non-interactionist views of the soul like occasionalism and Leibniz's pre-established harmony (Plantinga, "Materialism and Christian Belief," 127). Such views might appear at first blush invulnerable to EAACCP. Since God is a non-physical cause, however, the causal closure of the physical would rule out such views along with dualism-interactionism.

[65] Hasker, *Emergent Self*, 68; cf. 79. Hasker presents what he calls the Argument from Reason not as a "Skeptical Threat" argument but rather as a "Best Explanation" argument. That is to say, his argument begins by assuming the validity of our reasoning and then asks how that validity can be best accounted for. While I agree with Hasker that dualism-interactionism provides a better explanation of the reliability of our cognitive faculties than does materialism, the Skeptical Threat argument is even more devastating. Moon observes that some philosophers distinguish between skeptical arguments and debunking arguments like Plantinga's; but he finds such a distinction dubious, since skeptical arguments may, like debunking arguments, be probabilistic and empirically based (Andrew Moon, "Global Debunking Arguments," 305).

[66] See this *Systematic Philosophical Theology*, vol. I: De fide. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2024), vol. I, 279–283.

defeater of the reliability of one's cognitive faculties. Therefore, the materialist cannot block defeat by appeal to a defeater-defeater, since all of his beliefs are already defeated.

Rather what the materialist needs is what Plantinga calls a defeater-deflector.[67] The materialist might argue that even if, given belief in CCP & E, the probability that our cognitive faculties are reliable is low, nevertheless there could be *other* beliefs B he also holds, such that on CCP & E & B together the reliability of our cognitive faculties is not improbable. B then serves as a defeater-deflector for the potential defeater, that is, B prevents the admittedly low probability of the reliability of our faculties given CCP & E from being a defeater for the reliability of our faculties.

While a defeater-defeater assumes that some belief is a defeater that must in turn be defeated, a defeater-deflector prevents the belief from being a defeater in the first place. Figuring out exactly which beliefs can legitimately function as defeater-deflectors is a difficult question and constitutes a serious challenge for materialists that needs to be addressed. Plantinga refers to this problem as the conditionalization problem: Which beliefs B are such that if the probability is high that our faculties are reliable given CCP & E & B, then B prevents the defeat of the reliability of our faculties? Clearly, for instance, B cannot just be the belief that our faculties are reliable, for that would be obviously question-begging.

In a recent contribution Moon attempts to solve the conditionalization problem for a certain type of debunking argument that he calls an undercutter-while-rebutter such as he takes Plantinga to offer.[68] What is

[67] In personal correspondence, Moon explains that, instead of offering a defeater-deflector, one might insist that the intuitive support for the reliability of our faculties, their seeming to be reliable, overwhelms the probabilistic evidence against it from CCP & E. It is far from clear that this escape route is viable, but if it is, then we have a reason to reject CCP & E, which is all the better for the dualist-interactionist. "So, EITHER the believer in CCP&E gets a defeater for R (and hence, global defeat) OR must reject CCP&E" (Andrew Moon to William Lane Craig, January 26, 2022). "R" stands for "Human cognitive faculties are generally reliable."

[68] Moon distinguishes two interpretations of Plantinga's debunking argument which he classes as undercutter-because-rebutter and undercutter-while-rebutter respectively. The former claims that the materialist has an undercutting defeater of the reliability of his faculties because he has a rebutting defeater of the reliability of his faculties, whereas the latter claims that the materialist has an undercutting defeater of the reliability of his faculties as well as, but independent of, a rebutting defeater of the reliability of his faculties. The main difference between them is that the first tries to defeat R directly while the latter does so indirectly. In the latter case "there is not a rebutting defeater for R *first*, which then brings about an undercutting defeater for each belief (including belief in R)." Rather "you have both a rebutter and an undercutter for R, but the latter doesn't *depend* on the former." Rather it depends on there being rebutting defeaters for each individual faculty involved in producing belief in R. One defeats the faculties separately rather than collectively. Moon notes that the premises of both interpretations of Plantinga's argument are the same; but the undercutter-while-rebutter interpretation offers a new way of defending the premises that is even more difficult to refute (Moon, "Global Debunking Arguments," 314–318). He says, "CCP&E would threaten the believer in R with an undercutter-while-rebutter. Put another way, CCP&E is a reason to think that each individual faculty didn't evolve reliably, and it's also a reason to think that the collection of faculties didn't evolve reliably. So, that's a pretty big problem!" (Andrew Moon to William Lane Craig, January 26, 2022). For our purposes the distinction is not crucial, since either version will require some answer to the conditionalization problem and a satisfactory solution on the part of the materialist.

needed, says Moon, is a "*reliability-promoting, epistemic origin story*," that is to say, an account of how we came to have our cognitive faculties such that, conditional on it, there is a high probability that our cognitive faculties are reliable.[69] Moon offers what he calls an Epistemic Origin Story Solution (EO-Solution) to the conditionalization problem:

> *EO-Solution*. Even if S's belief that *X and Pr(R|X) is low* is a potential undercutter-while-rebutter for R, the belief that *B and Pr(R|X&B) is high* is a defeater-deflector for that potential undercutter-while-rebutter for R if and only if
>
> (a) S is justified (prior to considering the argument at hand) in believing that *B and Pr(R|X&B) is high*.
>
> (b) B is part of S's believed epistemic origin story.

In other words, Moon says, a justifiedly believed, reliability-promoting epistemic origin story will deflect a potential defeater for R. Though Moon's solution to the conditionalization problem is offered only for the undercutter-while-rebutter interpretation of Plantinga's argument, there seems to be no reason why it would not apply to both interpretations of EAACCP. In both cases the reason that we should conditionalize R on a justifiedly believed, epistemic origin story in order to determine whether R gets defeated is that one must prevent defeat from happening in the first place. Moon writes,

> Why is the justifiedly believed epistemic origin story what R should be conditionalized on to determine whether R gets defeated? . . . Given the powerful undercutting power of undercutters-while-rebutters, most bits of evidence one would like to appeal to to deflect the potential defeater will get undercut. To prevent defeat, one must prevent the undercutting from happening in the first place. The appropriate deflector to such a potential defeater will be the set of justifiedly believed propositions in one's justifiedly believed epistemic origin story, propositions that make probable and *explain* why R is *true*. This will prevent undercutting from happening in the first place.[70]

What is said here of undercutters-while-rebutters could with equal justice be said of undercutters-because-rebutters: to prevent defeat, one must prevent the rebutting from happening in the first place. That requires an origin story.[71]

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[69] Moon, "Global Debunking Arguments," 320.

[70] Andrew Moon, 325.

[71] Recall our earlier illustration in vol. 1: suppose that you learn that that your dinner was tainted with a certain drug that distorts the color vision of 95% of the people who ingest it. You would now have a defeater for the reliability of your color vision. However, suppose that before dinner a scientific expert had informed you on the basis of a blood test that you are among the 5% who are immune to the drug. In this case the would-be

So the question is whether the materialist can offer a justifiedly believed, reliability-promoting epistemic origin story. It is very hard to see how he can. We know that the probability that our faculties are reliable given CCP & E is low. E already includes the materialist's epistemic origin story. Is there something that could be added to E consistent with materialism that would do the job? It is hard to see what that could be. Given the causal closure of the physical, there seems to be nothing that might be added to E that would raise the probability that our cognitive faculties are reliable.[72]

It is not clear, therefore, what defeater-deflector the materialist can offer to stave off defeat by Plantinga's argument. Unless and until such a defeater-deflector can be identified, belief in the causal closure of the physical is irrational. Therefore the objection based on the problem of causal interaction cannot be rationally affirmed.

In sum, the most widespread and influential philosophical objection to substance dualism and, hence, to divine incorporeality fails. Ultimately, physical causation is just as inexplicable as mental causation. Given the sound arguments for a transcendent Creator and Designer of the universe, we can be confident that God can interact causally with the physical world, even if we do not understand how, just as, given our direct acquaintance with ourselves and the arguments for the existence of the soul, the dualist-interactionist can be confident that the soul does interact causally with the body, even if we do not understand how. Finally, the impossibility of causal interaction between soul and body and, hence, between God and the world cannot be rationally affirmed, since to affirm the causal closure of the physical is irrational, pending some justifiedly believed, reliability-promoting, materialist, epistemic origin story.

2.3.2.2 The Causal Pairing Problem

The problem here for dualism-interactionism, as identified by Jaegwon Kim, is how to explain the causal connection between a particular cause and a particular effect, which Kim believes to be insoluble in a case involving an immaterial mental substance like the soul.[73] In the case of physical substances, a causal connection between two events exists in virtue of their

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defeater never becomes a defeater in the first place. It is deflected by what you already believe. You have a justifiedly believed, reliability-promoting epistemic origin story about your color vision.

[72] Moon wonders whether a naturalist might use some justifiedly believed theory in philosophy of mind as an admissible defeater-deflector ("Global Debunking Arguments," 325). It is hard to see how this could be the case, since any such theory must be committed to the causal closure of the physical to be consistent. Even the occasionalist cannot appeal to God to guarantee the reliability of his faculties, since that would violate CCP.

[73] Jaegwon Kim, *Physicalism, or Something Near Enough* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 78–88. See also Jaegwon Kim, "Lonely Souls: Causality and Substance Dualism," in *Soul, Body, and Survival: Essays on the Metaphysics of Human Persons*, ed. Kevin J. Corcoran (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 30–43.

spatial relations, such as their spatial orientation and the spatio-temporal path along which a causal chain between them lies. But assuming that the soul, being immaterial, is not spatially located, the causal connection between mental events and physical events is inexplicable.

We are invited to imagine two souls, A and B, who are in the same mental state, for example, willing to lift one's left arm. If souls are not spatially located in their respective bodies, then there seems to be no explanation why A's willing causes A's arm to rise rather than B's arm. It does no good to rejoin that A wills to lift *this* arm rather than *that* one, for we can imagine that A and B both will to lift *this* arm, but only A's volition is effective.[74] What then explains the causal connection between A's mental state and the physical event of A's arm's rising? One cannot say that the explanation lies in the fact that the body in question is A's body, for the reason it is A's body is because of A's causal connection to it, both affecting it and being affected by it, so that such an explanation would be viciously circular. Dualism thus seems unable to explain the pairing of mental causes with their physical effects.

Since Kim's argument is meant to hold for immaterial mental substances in general, there should be a theological application of it, which has been called the divine causal pairing problem.[75] The challenge here is to explain, given God's transcendence of space, why his mental events are causally connected with certain events in the physical world rather than others. Granted the causal pairing problem for human souls, "it is unlikely that God stands in the right kind of relation to the world such that his action can cause, for example, the Red Sea to part rather than the Mediterranean Sea. The problems that plague non-physical human minds plague the divine mind as well."[76]

Kim's causal pairing problem thus involves two claims: (1) causation requires pairing relations connecting cause to effect and (2) there are no such relations for minds that are not spatially located. Not only are both claims dubious with respect to anthropological dualism, but they become positively implausible with respect to God's causal activity in the world.

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[74] Plantinga, "Materialism and Christian Belief," 131.

[75] Gregory E. Ganssle, "Divine Causation and the Pairing Problem," in *Divine Causation*, ed. Gregory E. Ganssle (London: Routledge, 2022), 269. Andrew M. Bailey, Joshua Rasmussen, and Luke Van Horn, "No Pairing Problem," *Philosophical Studies* 154, no. 3 (2011): 351, earlier noted this consequence of Kim's objection.

[76] Ganssle, "Pairing Problem," 270. Ganssle's illustration is more perspicuous than Bailey, Rasmussen, and Van Horn's illustration of explaining why some physical effect is due to God's causal activity rather than the activity of some other non-spatial soul (Bailey, Rasmussen, and Van Horn, "No Pairing Problem," 351n5), since that might lead us to pursue the red herring of God's unique causal capacities, for example, the ability to create *ex nihilo*. We want to know why God's mental act is causally connected to one physical event rather than another.

The first claim assumes that there must be some general pairing relation that connects causes and their effects. Why think this?[77] Kim does not say. Bailey, Rasmussen, and Van Horn speculate, "We have a guess as to the underlining [*sic*] reasoning for thinking that there must be a pairing relation: pairing is required because the satisfaction of a generality condition is necessary for causation," for example:

> (GC) Necessarily, if A and B share all of their qualitative properties, then A is no more qualified to count as the cause of C than B is.

Now Kim presupposes the truth of event causation, the view that the relata of causal relations are exclusively events. But many anthropological dualists embrace agent causation, the view that agents bring about effects by means of their actions. Bailey, Rasmussen, and Van Horn contend that libertarian causal agency constitutes an exception to any generality condition stipulating that qualitatively indistinguishable causes (like souls) cannot have different effects:

> It's common for immaterialists about human persons to think that a person can enjoy agent causal powers that allow her to choose an action among a range of alternative actions. The idea is that no property instantiated prior to the time of the agent's action fixes exactly which action she performs. . . . We think such immaterialists would happily grant in addition that indistinguishable agents would (or at least could) have the same causal capacities. Now consider a world in which two persons, Tim and Tom, are exactly similar in all respects. . . . Suppose that Tim and Tom each have the same two options available to them – to cause A or to refrain from causing A. If Tom happens to cause A while Tim refrains, then we have a situation in which GC fails. The reason is that Tom and Tim are indistinguishable and yet Tom counts as the cause of A, whereas Tim does not.[78]

If libertarian free agents are causes of effects, then a soul could be the cause of a particular physical effect even though nothing distinguishes it qualitatively from another soul. Ganssle concludes that "Kim's argument

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[77] Plantinga protests,

> "Is it really clear that in any case of causation, there must be this factor X that pairs up event A with event B, that makes it the case that A is the cause of B? . . . why must we suppose that *there is* such a factor X? . . . Consider the similar and oft-asked question about identity over time. What is it that makes it the case that object A at time t is identical with object B at some earlier time t*? . . . Many answers have been proposed, but none seems to work. And perhaps the right answer to the question is: there isn't anything (anything *else*, so to speak) that makes it the case that A is identical with B. Identity doesn't have to supervene on other properties. . . . Couldn't it be the same in the case of causation?" (Plantinga, "Materialism and Christian Belief," 131–132).

[78] Bailey, Rasmussen, and Van Horn, "No Pairing Problem," 354.

will work only against those versions of dualism that do not include an agent-causation view. Any position that involves this kind of agency will be immune from Kim's argument."[79]

Still, the Christian theologian will not want to make Christian theism hang upon the success of agent causation, so it will be prudent to ask why GC must hold even in the case of event causation. Why could there not be singular causal relations that do not fall under some more general condition? This is the very plausible claim that two events can be causally related without their connection's being explained in terms of some further relation such as Kim envisions. As Bailey, Rasmussen, and Van Horn explain, "if singular causal relations are possible, then it seems that it should be possible for a cause to stand in a singular causal relation to an effect while there is an indistinguishable candidate cause in the neighborhood, given that singular causal relations are not fixed/determined by the properties that a thing has."[80] They observe, moreover, that "many immaterialists and materialists alike believe in the possibility of singular causation and are therefore committed to the denial of GC."[81] Being in such good company, the Christian theologian will rightly insist that he is far more confident that God acts in the world than that some such general condition is true.

The second assumption of Kim's objection, it will be recalled, is that no such pairing relations exist for minds that are not spatially located. Anthropological dualists who hold that souls do exist spatially in or throughout their bodies will therefore be unfazed by Kim's objection, since souls meet successfully the condition for being causally connected to their effects.[82] In the same way, theists who take God to exist spatially throughout the universe may be able to argue that God meets the same condition as well.[83] But the objection remains relevant for dualist-interactionists who think that souls, including God, do not have spatial locations. The question, then, is why we should think that only spatial relations can pair a cause with its effect. *Prima facie* this seems surprisingly restrictive.[84]

Indeed, it is difficult even to state the pairing problem for God's causal activity in a way that does not appear a bit silly. For example, Ganssle writes, "If we need some relation to be present to link cause and effect, we will

[79] Ganssle, "Pairing Problem," 272.
[80] Bailey, Rasmussen, and Van Horn, "No Pairing Problem," 355.
[81] Bailey, Rasmussen, and Van Horn, 355.
[82] For a discussion of Kim's objections to spatially located souls see Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, *A Brief History of the Soul* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 140–146.
[83] See our discussion of divine omnipresence *infra*, chap. 8.
[84] As Bailey, Rasmussen, and Van Horn, "No Pairing Problem," 351, point out, Kim's claim entails that the initial cosmological singularity featured in the standard Big Bang model could not possibly have been caused, given that the singularity is thought to represent the beginning of the existence of space.

need a link between God's willing and its effect. God wills that the Red Sea part. What makes it the case that this results in the parting of the Red Sea rather than the Mediterranean Sea?"[85] How can such a question even be posed with respect to an omnipotent being whose volitions are inevitably fulfilled? The will of such a being is indefectible – necessarily, it is linked to its effect.[86] It is metaphysically impossible that God wills the parting of the Red Sea and the Mediterranean parts instead. So, while for some physical causes such as a rock's hitting and breaking a window, "the spatiotemporal relation is sufficient to map the cause to a particular effect," says Ganssle, "It is possible that, when God acts, it is the direct object of his volition that maps the cause to the intended effect."[87] Indeed, necessarily, whatever God wills shall be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

God's actions, then, are guided by divine intentionality, what he intends to accomplish. Ganssle correctly states that "When God parts the Red Sea, there is a causal relation at work. God wills, and the Red Sea parts. God's picking out the Red Sea, however, is not causal."[88] But Ganssle's further claim that "divine intentionality is a direct, non-causal relation. . . . The Red Sea itself – the particular body of water – is immediately present to God's cognition" is inconsistent with his affirmation that intentionality "is not a relation at all," but rather "a monadic property of *being of/about* that is exemplified by the relevant mental state."[89] Given such an understanding, it is inept to think that when God picks out the Red Sea in thought, the Red Sea itself is immediately present to God's cognition. As J. N. Findlay pointed out long ago, to think, for example, that China is a constituent of the property *to-the-east-of-China* is absurd, for then China must inhere, in all its solid immensity, in the Philippine Islands.[90] Similarly, with respect to intentionality, if I think of *X*, my *thinking-of-X* is plausibly a mental monadic property of which *X* is not a constituent. My state of mind has the

[85] Ganssle, "Pairing Problem," 274.

[86] As Mullins and Byrd remind us, "Classical Christian theology is . . . committed to God's infallible causal power. God's causal power is infallible in that, if God wills or causes some state of affairs *x*, then it is not possible for *x* to fail to obtain. This is sometimes captured by saying that if God intentionally acts to bring about some state of affairs, then that state of affairs is hypothetically necessary" (R.T. Mullins and Shannon Eugene Byrd, "Divine Simplicity and Modal Collapse: A Persistent Problem," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 14, no. 3 [2023]: 28). So, in answer to the question, "What is that factor X in the case of alleged divine causation?" Plantinga answers, "here there appears to be an easy answer. According to classical theism, it's a necessary truth that whatever God wills, takes place. . . . So what is it that makes it the case that God's intentions cause what they cause? To ask that question is like asking, 'What is it that makes an equiangular triangle equilateral?' The answer is (broadly) logical necessity; it's necessary that whatever God wills comes to be, just as it's necessary that every equiangular triangle be equilateral" (Plantinga, "Materialism and Christian Belief," 133).

[87] Ganssle, "Pairing Problem," 276.

[88] Ganssle, 280.

[89] Ganssle, 278, citing Moreland (my italics for the sake of clarity).

[90] J. N. Findlay, *Meinong's Theory of Objects and Values*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 40–41.

monadic property of *being-directed-to-X*, whether or not *X* exists. One may then causally bring about *X*.[91]

2.3.2.3 The Problem of the Conservation of Energy

The conservation laws require that energy be neither created nor destroyed. But if the soul produces effects in the brain, then neuroscientists ought to observe violation of the conservation laws because energy is increased in this physical system even when it is closed to outside physical causes. But no such violation of the conservation laws is observed by neuroscientists. By extension, God's causing effects in the universe would involve an observable violation of the conservation laws governing the closed system that is the physical universe.

There are two pertinent questions with respect to this objection. First, would the soul's or God's acting in the physical world violate the conservation of energy? Here we must distinguish between violation of the conservation of energy and violation of the conservation laws. Brian Pitts explains that if the soul does act upon the body, then the conservation of energy and momentum obviously does not hold.[92] Conservation of energy and momentum is fundamentally local in nature, varying with time and place: "Dualism claims that immaterial souls affect bodies; but souls are not (present? and) active in the same way everywhere and always, so any causal influence from the soul on the body will vary with time and place, leading to the non-conservation of energy and momentum where and when they act (and only there and then)."[93] On the other hand:

> The assumption of the conservation of energy and momentum at every point in space. . . at every moment of time implies . . . that the laws of physics are invariant under rigid time- and space translations: the temporal and spatial uniformity of nature. Hence any mental influence $\Psi(t, x, y, z)$ must be the same everywhere and always (Ψ = constant). But surely my willing to raise my arm on Earth in 2018 does not have a uniform influence everywhere and throughout the whole history and future of the universe.[94]

[91] By contrast, Ganssle's account is viciously circular, for if the Red Sea must itself be present to God when he intends it, then it already exists at least logically, if not chronologically, prior to his causing it to exist.
[92] J. Brian Pitts, "Conservation Laws and the Philosophy of Mind: Opening the Black Box, Finding a Mirror," *Philosophia* 48 (2020): 673–707. Pitts does not always keep the distinction I have drawn clear, though his intent is clear.
[93] Pitts, "Conservation Laws," 683.
[94] Pitts, 686.

It follows that "it is perfectly clear that such a physical system lacks the symmetries of time- and space-translation invariance in the regions of mental influence [e.g., the brain]. . . . the mere fact (if it is a fact) that my mind acts on my body and not on Mars implies that mental causation (on the view in question) violates momentum conservation."[95]

By contrast the conservation laws are conditional propositions and so are not violated when the conditions are not met. Although the conservation laws can be stated technically,[96] we scientific laymen can appreciate the point by realizing that the conservation laws state that energy is conserved for some system only if there is no external force acting on that system. Pitts calls this response to the present objection the "conditionality" response: "conservation fails but that is no objection because the law is conditional on the lack of outside influence."[97] As conditionals, the laws are not violated when, as a result of the soul's influence, energy and momentum are not conserved: "since dualism contradicts the antecedent (no external force), dualism's contradicting the consequent (the conservation of energy and momentum) cannot be refuted merely by talking about supposed but overly strong 'laws' of conservation. No true conservation 'law' is violated even if conservation fails."[98]

Therefore, if the energy of a physical system increases in the absence of any physical cause, no law if violated if the increase is due to the action of a non-physical cause outside the scope of the laws. This is the lesson learned from discussion of the hoary problem of miracles.[99] Although we shall have more to say about this when we come to the locus *De creatione*, suffice it for now to say that a miracle is a naturally impossible event, that is to say, an event beyond the causal capacity of the natural causes at the time and place in question, but its occurrence is not a violation of nature's laws, since those laws have implicit *ceteris paribus* conditions that no supernatural causes are intervening. Similarly, the laws of thermodynamics have conditions and so are not violated when those conditions are not satisfied.

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[95] Pitts, 676.

[96] Pitts provides the mathematics, explaining, "The conservation of energy follows if and (basically) only if the Lagrangian lacks explicit dependence on time. . . . Thus the conservation of energy follows as a *conditional* claim (actually a biconditional one), not a categorical one" (Pitts, 693).

[97] Pitts, 677–78. He observes, "whereas many philosophers believe energy conservation to be a *categorical* result of physics. . . , a few authors writing on the philosophy of mind have rightly asserted that energy conservation in theoretical physics is *conditional* upon the absence of external influences" (683). For example, Robin Collins explains that "physical laws only describe how the physical world does (or must) behave when there is no intervention from outside the physical order" (pre-print of Collins, "Modern Physics").

[98] Pitts, "Conservation Laws," 688. Pitts seems here to confuse necessary and sufficient conditions.

[99] See William Lane Craig, "Creation, Providence, and Miracle," in *Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Brian Davies (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1998), 136–162; William Lane Craig, "Creation and Divine Action," in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion,* ed. Chad Meister and Paul Copan (London: Routledge, 2007), 318–28.

This failing of the objection should not be confused with the common reply that the physical laws are not violated because neither the brain nor the universe is a closed system. Such a reply is misguided because it implies that God and the soul are part of a wider physical system characterized by a certain energy, which contradicts dualism.[100] Collins objects, "presumably the 'energy' of an immaterial substance does not gravitationally attract other masses, nor does it have inertia, nor can one write a Hamiltonian function for it. Accordingly, it is difficult to see how the concept of 'mind energy' is anything like the concept of physical energy."[101] Rather than finding in the soul or God a wider reality governed by the laws of thermodynamics, we should simply deny that such physical laws hold for immaterial substances.

Be all this as it may with respect to the action of the soul upon the body, the present objection becomes relevant to God's action in the world, it would seem, only in the case of miracles. Since the conservation laws are fundamentally local, God's actions *on* the world to conserve it in being, rather than *in* the world, do not involve any spikes in energy or momentum in the universe. Hence, God can be causally related to the world as cause to effect without any impact on the conservation (in the scientific sense!) of energy and momentum. To borrow Pitts' phrase, God's mental influence $\Psi(t, x, y, z)$ could be the same everywhere and always, so that in contrast to my willing to raise my arm God's willing has a uniform influence everywhere and throughout the whole history and future of the universe.[102] Only in the case of miracles like parting the Red Sea or changing water into wine would God's action involve non-conservation of energy.

The second and more appropriate question for dualism-interactionism is, if the soul through its causal interaction with the body is constantly

[100] Collins also complains that the reply does not adequately capture the conservation principle involved, which he states as the principle that the rate of change of total energy in a spatially closed region of space is equal to the total rate of energy flowing through the boundary of the space, what he calls the boundary principle of the conservation of energy (BPEC). Since BPEC makes no reference to causally closed systems, the common reply needs revision. But even a suitably revised reply in terms of God's sending energy through the boundary of the universe or creating energy *ex nihilo* within the spatial confines of the universe still implies that God is subject to physical laws, which is false.

Although Collins finds that contemporary physics is open to exceptions to BPEC for certain physical theories and interpretations of them, such as general relativistic laws governing changes in the total energy of a circumscribed region of space, quantum mechanical interpretations implying the collapse of a superposition of eigenstates of energy by measurement, and quantum mechanical interaction without energy exchange in EPR situations, such examples are very controversial. Even if these theories or interpretations are in fact false, however, still they seem to be at least metaphysically possible, which suffices for the possibility of mental causation of energy changes in the brain or world. But these physical exceptions are really quite beside the main point, which is that God as an incorporeal being is not governed by physical laws.

[101] Pre-print of Collins of "Modern Physics.".

[102] God's activity need not imply his existing spatially (see *infra*, 395–397), for as Pitts says, "The locality of conservation laws . . . makes it important to reconsider where souls are, *or at any rate where they act*, on the assumption that they exist and act. . . . Thus what counts is *where a soul acts*, not *where it is* (if it is anywhere) (Pitts, "Conservation Laws," 691, 693 [my emphasis]).

creating spikes in the energy of the brain which are physically uncaused, then why do we not observe such mysterious, seemingly uncaused changes in the entropy level of the brain? Why are such miraculous effects hidden from us? Pitts considers this problem to pose a serious challenge to anthropological dualism-interactionism.[103]

Anthropological dualists may appropriate the point of certain divine action theorists that even if there were such energy increases, the indeterminacy involved in quantum physical processes permits undetectable increases in energy to be involved in the mind's interaction with neural processes in the brain.[104] What Nancey Murphy, an anthropological monist, allows for God could be said with equal justice for the soul's action on the neural processes of the brain:

> within the wider range of effects allowed by God's action in and through sub-atomic entities, God restricts his action in order to produce a world that *for all we can tell* is orderly and law-like in its operation. . . . God affects human consciousness by stimulation of neurons – much as a neurologist can affect conscious states by careful electrical stimulation of parts of the brain. God's action on the nervous system would not be from the outside, of course, but by means of bottom-up causation from within. Such stimulation would cause thoughts to be recalled to mind; presumably it could cause the occurrence of new thoughts by coordinated stimulation of several ideas, concepts, or images stored in memory.[105]

The hidden activity of the soul, since it is invested by God with only finite powers, should not be viewed as a self-limitation, as it would be in God's case.[106] Such a proposal does not depend upon construing quantum indeterminacy ontically but at most epistemically, as allowed by Heisenberg's

[103] Pitts, 679, 699–700.

[104] Pitts notes that quite a number of anthropological dualist-interactionists have appealed to quantum physics to make room for mental causation, including Arthur Eddington, Eugene Wigner, Henry Margenau, Karl Popper and John Eccles, Henry Stapp, Roger Penrose, Walter Freeman and Giuseppe Vitiello, Hans Halvorson and Adrian Kent (Pitts, "Conservation Laws," 679–680). Jeremy Butterfield errs in saying that this response "is weak: clearly, the onus is on the interactionist to argue that they [energy gains or losses in brains] could be small, and indeed are likely to be small" (Jeremy Butterfield, "Quantum Curiosities of Psychophysics," in *Consciousness and Human Identity*, ed. J. Cornwell [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997], 146). For the interactionist is obliged to offer only an undercutting, not a rebutting, defeater of the alleged defeater. The onus is rather on the physicalist to show that such gains/losses must be detectably large.

[105] Nancey Murphy, "Divine Action in the Natural Order: Buridan's Ass and Schrödinger's Cat," in *Philosophy, Science and Divine Action,* ed. F. LeRon Shults, Nancey Murphy, and Robert John Russell (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2009), 281, 293–294.

[106] See Pitts' comment, "Some authors who appreciate the conditional nature of conservation laws, by falling silent after asserting the conditionality, seem to suggest that where conservation does not hold, there is just nothing to say. That silence could be worrisome. If my soul can create enough energy to tell my brain to make my finger move, can it create an airplane on a runway?" (Pitts, "Conservation Laws," 687).

Uncertainty Principle. Hence, the mind could be causally influencing the brain without our ever being able to detect its influence upon the energy levels of the brain.

In fact, however, no such recourse to quantum indeterminacy is necessary. Uwe Meixner provides a more realistic assessment of the situation when he writes,

> In every second, countless physical events take place in any human brain. Do all of these events have a sufficient physical cause, and does the cause, in turn, itself have a sufficient physical cause, and so on? How could we know – *scientifically* know – that this is indeed the case? . . . the assertion of a purely physical sufficient causation of all the events in the human brain has more to do with adopting physicalism (a position which is just as metaphysical as dualism) than with respecting *science* and scientific evidence.[107]

Mihretu Guta identifies two conditions which must be satisfied in order to exclude the soul's causal influence upon the brain: (1) the soul's actions must be empirically identifiable within the brain's complex neurophysiological processes/events, and (2) there must be some way of determining whether or not we have succeeded in satisfying (1).[108] An immediate problem is that the overwhelming majority of neuroscientists have no interest whatsoever in detecting the activity of the soul, so that the question has not been adequately investigated. Be that as it may, the most promising way to identify the soul's activity would be by employing brain imaging techniques, such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), positron emission tomography (PET), and electroencephalogram (EEG). Unfortunately, these imaging techniques have limitations that are in some ways analogous to Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. Ideally speaking, when neuronal signals are recorded, we want to get complete information on the time it takes for a particular population of neurons to fire and where in the brain those electrical signals occur. But no techniques are available that allow us to do that in one experimental setting. We cannot get information

[107] Uwe Meixner to William Lane Craig, February 18, 2022.

[108] Mihretu Guta to William Lane Craig, February 24, 2022. Guta, who specializes in mind-body problems, also notes that studies of entropic increases or decreases of the brain tell us nothing about the soul's activity as such. Rodrigues aptly remarks, "it is doubtful any empirical evidence would be available in practice, since it is virtually impossible to measure the precise energy of the brain (or of a human body), to see whether it remains constant or whether the variations are due to external physical factors or an immaterial soul. Such an experimental set up, although maybe possible in principle, is out of the question in practice" (José Gusmão Rodrigues, "There Are No Good Objections to Substance Dualism," *Philosophy* 89, no. 22 [2014]: 217–218).

about the spatial resolution and the temporal resolution of electric brain signals simultaneously. Moreover, even if complete information were in principle achievable, the sheer volume of neurons (exceeding 100 billion) and neuronal synaptic connections (exceeding 100 trillion) make the task difficult. To all this, we may add that chemical signals also work in a highly complex fashion in conjunction with electrical signals. Correlating such electrical and chemical signals with some sort of mental content is extremely tricky. Thus, there does not seem to be a feasible way of satisfying (1) or (2).

In any case, whether or not entropic changes in the brain constitute a serious challenge to anthropological dualism-interactionism, the present objection falls completely flat when it comes to theism. The analogue to the soul's causal action on the brain will be God's miraculous intervention in the universe. The objection, then, is not to theism or divine incorporeality as such but reduces to the problem of miracles: we do not observe the sudden decrease in entropy that would be associated with a dramatic miracle. But here we need no entropic measure to discern a miracle. As Pitts quips, "While sufficiently gross violations [of energy conservation] wouldn't require the mathematics to discern – such as if an aircraft carrier suddenly appeared in a wheat field in Kansas *ex nihilo*, or even levitation. . . there seem not to be such cases pertaining to the philosophy of mind."[109] Unlike the soul's actions, God's may be easy to discern. Since we have no expectation of the frequency of miracles, there is just no objection to God's miraculous activity in the physical world. The classical theist need not, like some of these timorous divine action theorists, be looking for a way for God to act in the world without miraculous interventions or decreases in entropy. So this third problem is exclusively a neuroscientific objection to anthropological dualism-interactionism that has no relevance to divine incorporeality.

What other philosophical objections might be raised against divine incorporeality? In their treatment of divine incorporeality, Joshua Hoffman and Gary Rosenkrantz discuss a few additional objections to God's immateriality.[110]

[109] Pitts, "Conservation Laws," 699.

[110] Joshua Hoffman and Gary S. Rosenkrantz, *The Divine Attributes* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 41–51. For a discussion of additional, less important objections to divine immateriality, see Alvin Plantinga, "Materialism and Christian Belief," 121–125; Charles Taliaferro, *Consciousness*, 256–270. I shall say something about J. C. A. Gaskin's objection to God's visual representations when we discuss divine omnipresence *infra*, 414–415.

2.3.2.4 The Problem of Individuation

For entities of any ontological category, there must be an adequate principle of individuation distinguishing one from another. Physical objects that are qualitatively indistinguishable, like two perfectly similar spheres, may be individuated on the basis of their spatial location. But now imagine once more two souls who are qualitatively indistinguishable. Since two souls of this kind would lack a principle of individuation, the concept of a soul is unintelligible.

Hoffman and Rosenkrantz assume that souls are not spatially located, which many anthropological dualists deny. But even if souls are aspatial, it seems to me that the anthropological dualist may plausibly respond to this objection by maintaining that two such minds are individuated by their irreducible, real, exclusively private, first-person perspectives that make one awareness belong to one subject and another similar awareness belong to another subject.[111] What has been rightly called the transcendental ego is ineliminable because every attempt at self-objectification presupposes a subject who does the objectifying. Two selves who have similar mental states thus refer to different persons by their use of the first-person indexical "I." As we shall see when we come to a discussion of the Trinity,[112] even the three Trinitarian persons are irreducibly distinct in virtue of their different first-person perspectives.

Be that as it may, the objection is a non-starter when applied to God, for God is a single, unique, immaterial substance or soul. There is nothing else that might be confused with him. God is therefore necessarily individuated.

2.3.2.5 The Problem of Description

The complaint here is that souls must be negatively described, for example, as immaterial. But that leaves us bereft of any positive concept of what a soul is.

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[111] Hoffman and Rosenkrantz themselves hold that souls can be individuated by the possession of the trope *a particular consciousness* (of the soul in question) (*Divine Attributes*, 45). In response to the claim that a relation of diversity between two entities *x* and *y* cannot stand alone but must be grounded in some other irreflexive relation between them, Hoffman and Rosenkrantz reply that "souls are separated by their *epistemic apartness*, i.e., their incapacity to be directly aware of one another's mental states" (46). They explain, "In general, it is a necessary truth that if *x* is other than *y*, then *x* cannot directly experience a mental state of *y*. Thus, necessarily, a soul is *incapable* of being directly aware of the mental states of *another soul*, and God could not be directly aware of the mental states of another soul. Moreover, it is necessarily true that a soul is capable of being directly aware of its *own* mental states" (46). Thus, the diversity of souls is appropriately grounded. Curiously, Hoffman and Rosenkrantz go on to emphasize that the epistemic apartness of souls cannot serve as a principle of individuation for souls because it is an irreflexive relation (46). This caveat requires that there be some difference between being diverse and being non-identical, since the condition for being diverse is admittedly satisfied by epistemic apartness. But what that difference could be is opaque to me. What remains true, in any case, is that souls are individuated by being a particular consciousness.

[112] See this *Systematic Philosophical Theology*, vol. IIb, *De Deo*, pt. II, *De Trinitate*.

Anthropological dualists rightly respond that not only are many physical entities also negatively described, for example, as massless in the case of photons, but more importantly, just as such physical entities can also be positively described, so can the soul, for example, as conscious. So Moreland and Rickabaugh flatly reject this objection: "it is just false to claim that there is no positive characterization of a soul. Dualists hold that it is a substance essentially characterized by the actual and dispositional properties of consciousness (and, perhaps, life)."[113] They explain that substance dualists characterize the soul as essentially *that which* _____, where the blank is filled with (at least) the following eight features:

1. exemplifies mental properties.
2. holistically unifies mental properties.
3. is an enduring mental continuant.
4. is the employer and referent of "I."
5. has an irreducible "First-Person Point of View."
6. is possibly disembodied as a unified center of consciousness.
7. ontologically grounds claims like "Necessarily, thoughts have thinkers."
8. exercises active power and teleologically guides a deliberative process towards an end.[114]

Though formulated with creaturely souls in mind, almost every item on this list also describes God. Indeed, as this locus illustrates, the concept of God is a rich, positive concept characterized by many extraordinary properties, not just a blank left unfilled by the *via negativa*.

2.3.2.6 The Problem of Diachronic Identity

The claim is that whereas physical objects can be given persistence conditions in terms of spatio-temporal continuity, souls lack any principle of persistence that make souls identical over time. But if there is anything that I know persists through time, it is I myself. I am the same person now who began this sentence a moment ago. Therefore I cannot be an immaterial object. In that case God, too, as an incorporeal entity, would have no grounds for personal identity over time.[115] Theists who construe

[113] Rickabaugh and Moreland, *Substance of Consciousness,* 304.
[114] Rickabaugh and Moreland, *Substance of Consciousness,* 303.
[115] This problem seems more relevant to partisans of a tensed theory of time, according to which ordinary 3D objects endure through time, existing wholly at each time at which they exist, than to partisans of a tenseless theory of time, according to which temporal entities are actually 4D objects composed of temporal slices or stages which do not endure through time (see *infra*, 292–293, 323–324, 349–353). One temporal slice is not identical to another, and so the only question of identity which arises is what makes these various slices belong to one object, what is sometimes called genidentity. So what makes the various temporal slices of the soul or God genidentical?

divine eternity in terms of timelessness would obviously be unfazed by this objection, but theists who think that God does exist temporally must face the question of God's persistence conditions.

Anthropological dualists will, however, find comfort in the fact that persistence conditions for physical objects are, in fact, extremely difficult to give in terms of spatio-temporal continuity or anything else, for that matter.[116] If necessary and sufficient conditions for diachronic personal identity cannot be given, so be it. Diachronic personal identity is brute. Dualists will sometimes hold that what grounds the persistence of a human being over time is his simple, irreducible, rational, substantial self or soul, which endures through bodily changes. But the diachronic identity of the soul itself is a brute fact.

However that may be, the objection is once again inapplicable to God, not because God does not persist through time if he is timeless, but because it is metaphysically impossible for there to be more than one God. Whereas it is possible for there to be a multiplicity of finite persons, God cannot be multiplied. Therefore if God exists at any time, there is no other God at any other time. Moreover, in view of his essential necessity and eternity, it is metaphysically impossible that he fail to persist through time.

Moreover, whereas personal memories fail for human beings as a sufficient condition for personal diachronic identity due to the possibility of false memories, in God's case his personal memories are sufficient for personal identity over time. For in view of his essential omniscience God cannot have false memories. It is metaphysically impossible that his memories of his past be mistaken. Therefore, necessarily, God persists over time. But such an account should not be thought to ground God's personal identity over time so much as to provide evidence for it. God has memories of himself because he is identical over time; he is not identical over time because he has memories of himself. Still, it is striking that one of the accounts of personal identity over time does not fail for God as it fails for human beings.

2.4 Concluding Remarks

The Christian theist has ample scriptural grounds for affirming divine incorporeality, grounds that are powerfully reinforced by multiple arguments of natural theology and by perfect being theology. God's immateriality is thus our starting point, and we then ask whether there are overriding

[116] For criticism of various accounts of personal identity over time and a defense of the view that diachronic personal identity is brute, see Trenton Merricks, *Objects and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

arguments against divine incorporeality that would serve to defeat this biblical teaching. We need not pick sides here in the heated debate over anthropological dualism, since Ockhamistic, scientific arguments against anthropological dualism and in support of anthropological materialism are irrelevant to God's being an immaterial Mind. Only those arguments that would have application to an unembodied, transcendent Mind need be considered.

The most important of the six arguments we examined, the problem of causal interaction, was seen to be reduced in force, not merely by the fact that physical causation is in the end just as inexplicable as mental causation, but especially by the fact that we have sound arguments for a transcendent Creator and Designer of the universe that imply that God can interact causally with the physical world, even if we do not understand how. In any case, Plantinga's EAACCP shows that the claim that causal interaction between mind and body does not and cannot occur is self-defeating and so incapable of rational affirmation, a devastating defeater of this objection.

The causal pairing problem is multiply flawed even on a human level, but becomes outrageously implausible when applied to God, since God's actions are infallibly paired with their effects in virtue of God's intentions and so always and inevitably produce their intended effects. The problem of the conservation of energy is in one respect a non-starter when it comes to the effects of the immaterial soul or God, since neither is a physical entity governed by natural laws; insofar as the observability of their effects is concerned, the effects of the soul on the brain could occur undetected within the range of the fluctuations of the energy permitted by quantum indeterminacy, while God's macroscopic acts may be there for all to see.

The problem of individuation is inapplicable to God in view of his uniqueness, while the problem of description has no relevance to God in light of his many positive attributes. The problem of diachronic identity is no worse for God and souls than for physical objects, for which adequate persistence conditions are equally difficult to state, and is in any case inapplicable to God in view of his uniqueness and other attributes, which precludes different Gods' existing at different times.

Having thus good scriptural and philosophico-theological reasons for affirming divine incorporeality and no overriding defeaters of that doctrine, we may safely proceed on the presupposition that God is incorporeal.[117]

[117] I am grateful to Stewart Goetz, Mihretu Guta, Michael Heiser, Craig Keener, Uwe Meixner, Andrew Moon, J. P. Moreland, and Charles Taliaferro for discussion of the issues raised in this section.

3
Necessity

Ever since Aristotle, God has been conceived in Western philosophical theology as a necessarily existent being (*ens necessarium*). On the basis of his argument for God from eternal motion, Aristotle claims to have proved the existence of an eternal, unchanging, uncaused, incorporeal cause of change.[1] Because God is immaterial, he is not subject to generation and corruption, as are things composed of form and matter. For Aristotle God's necessary existence probably meant simply his immunity to generation and corruption and, hence, his permanent existence.[2]

3.1 Biblical Data Concerning Divine Necessity

What scriptural data support the notion that God exists necessarily? From the time of the Church Fathers Christian theologians have interpreted the revelation of the divine name to Moses "I am that I am" (Ex 3.14) to express the idea of divine necessary existence.[3]

> Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM."

[1] For exposition of his argument see my *The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz* (London: Macmillan, 1980), chap. 2.
[2] *Metaphysica* Λ.7.1072b10; *De generatione et corruptione* 337b35.
[3] For example, Thomas Aquinas *Summa contra gentiles* 1.22.10, citing Ex 3.14 in support of the thesis that God is a necessary being *per se*; cf. *Summa theologiae* Ia.2.3 on the third way of demonstrating God's existence.

Systematic Philosophical Theology: On God: Attributes of God, Volume IIa, First Edition.
William Lane Craig.
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> And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations" (Ex 3.13–15).

It is significant that the divine name is not a name given by human beings to God but is revealed by God himself. Since proper names were understood in ancient Israel to reveal their bearer's character, God intends thereby to provide a self-revelation to Moses. Although some interpreters have suggested that God's enigmatic reply to Moses' question is a refusal to provide God's name, as if to say, "None of your business!" such an interpretation is unlikely because (i) the formula "I am who I am" does not mean "It is none of your concern" but is a play on the Hebrew verb *hāyâ* (to be); (ii) God's further statement, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" shows that the reply was not a refusal; and (iii) it is unlikely that the thousands of subsequent uses of YHWH (LORD) in the OT (6,823 times) are only a remembrance of God's refusing to give his name.[4]

The difficulty lies in understanding what the divine name was meant to convey. OT scholars have struggled to come to consensus concerning the import of the divine name revealed to Moses. Indeed, Brevard Childs comments that "Few verses in the entire Old Testament have evoked such heated controversy and such widely divergent interpretations."[5] Although modern interpreters have largely dismissed the traditional exegesis of this passage to support divine necessary being as misled by philosophical interests, Childs insists that it is far from obvious that the ancient Hebrews had no concept of being, such as seems to come to expression in the divine name. God's name is revealed in v. 14a to be *'ehyê 'ăšer 'ehyê* and then abbreviated in v. 14b as simply *'eyeh*. Although the full expression can be

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[4] Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 64; see also Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 69. By contrast Peter Enns argues that the fact that "I am" (*'ehyê*) is not elsewhere used in the OT as God's name, as opposed to YHWH, suggests that it was never intended as a serious answer to Moses' query (Peter Enns, *Exodus*, NIV Application Commentary [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000], 103–104). Enns' argument does not take seriously enough the fact that YHWH is itself a further variation of the divine name using the consonants of the third-person masculine singular of *hāyâ* in the Hiphil stem and in any case fails to explain why YHWH should be used at all if God had refused to give his name. See Victor Hamilton's sardonic comment that "It is unlikely. . . that the pathological anger that Jesus' 'Before Abraham was [born], I am!' (John 8:58) produces in his hearers is generated by their fuming over his grammatical gaffe. 'He doesn't even know how to parse the verb "be"! Let's kill him' " (Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011], 64). Such a passage is important for the Jewish understanding of the divine name during the NT era.

[5] Childs, *Book of Exodus,* 61.

variously translated as "I am who I am," "I will be who I will be," "I will be who I was," "I was who I will be," etc.,[6] the present tense version deserves pride of place since the statement in v. 14b featuring the abbreviated name could hardly mean "'I was' or 'I will be' has sent me to you."

Although commentators have often seen the divine name as an expression to Israel of God's abiding presence with them, such an interpretation does not at all exclude and might well comprise God's eternal being as a precondition of his abiding presence. Although it would doubtless be anachronistic to read into the name an expression of God's necessary existence in a broadly logical sense, ancient Hebrews in general and the Pentateuchal author in particular certainly had the conception of God as one who has never come into being and will never go out of being and therefore as necessary in the Aristotelian sense.[7] God's necessary existence in a broadly logical sense is thus one of those properties which is underdetermined by scriptural data but arguably a natural extension of God's existence along the lines of perfect being theology, since God would be even greater were he to exist necessarily rather than contingently.[8]

3.2 Two Notions of Divine Necessity

3.2.1 Factual Necessity

Scripture clearly supports God's necessary existence in the Aristotelian sense, in virtue of its affirmation of divine aseity, eternity, and supreme power.[9] The Aristotelian conception finds its counterpart among those contemporary philosophers who defend the idea of God's "factual"

[6] For the range of alternatives see Hamilton, *Exodus,* 64, who also notes that *'ăšer* could equally be translated as "what."

[7] See further the scriptural data concerning divine eternity, *infra*, 286–291. Moreover, the Pentateuchal author also had a sense of God as the Creator of all (Gen 1.1), so that understanding "YHWH" in the causative sense of the Hiphil stem, meaning "He causes to be," lay within his grasp.

[8] See the brief but helpful discussion by Brian Leftow, *God and Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 7–12. While Scripture exalts God as perfect in power, knowledge, goodness, wisdom, will, duration, presence, invulnerability, and therefore plausibly in his deity, Leftow acknowledges that with respect to modal perfections like necessary existence "Scripture is silent on these" (9). Perfect being theology seeks to fill out the concept of God by showing that God would be a more perfect being if he possessed a certain property than not. In contrast to a mere "pretty-impressive-being" theology, the statements by the scriptural authors license "the project of perfect-being theology even as its results far outstrip anything that they are likely to have understood their own words to imply" (10–11). Because our grasp of what constitutes a perfection is fallible, perfect being arguments will be fallible as well (12).

[9] See our survey of scriptural data in support of each of these attributes, *infra*, 63–68, 286–291, 417–420.

necessity.[10] According to this notion, God exists necessarily in the sense that, given that God exists, it is impossible that he ever came into or will go out of existence. He is uncaused, eternal, incorruptible, and indestructible.

3.2.2 Logical Necessity

During the Middle Ages, however, Islamic philosophers such as al-Fārābī began to enunciate an even more powerful conception of God's necessity: God's non-existence is logically impossible.[11] Fārābī based his distinction between necessary being and contingent being upon his distinction between essence and existence. Something exists in a logically necessary sense if and only if its essence somehow includes existence. This latter distinction allows Fārābī to treat beings which are necessary in an Aristotelian sense as not absolutely necessary or necessary *per se*, but merely derivatively necessary or necessary *ab alio*, once their cause is given.[12]

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[10] Principally John Hick, who coined the term, and Richard Swinburne, for whom God is the logically contingently existing explanatory ultimate. See John Hick, "God as Necessary Being," *Journal of Philosophy* 57 (1960): 733–734; Richard Swinburne, "What Kind of Necessary Being Could God Be?," in *Ontological Proofs Today*, ed. Mirosław Szatkowski (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 345–363. One might also mention Terence Penelhum and even the early Alvin Plantinga (Alvin Plantinga, "Necessary Being," in *Faith and Philosophy: Philosophical Studies in Religion and Ethics*, ed. Alvin Plantinga [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1964], 97–108; Terence Penelhum, "Divine Necessity," in *The Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Basil Mitchell [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971], 179–190). These thinkers in effect affirm divine aseity without affirming divine necessity in a broadly logical sense. Cf. Einar Duenger Bøhn, "Divine Necessity," *Philosophy Compass* 12, no. 11 (2017), https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12457, who wants to distinguish between strong and weak divine necessity. At first blush this might appear to be the distinction between broadly logical necessity and so-called factual necessity, but that is not what Bøhn means. Rather strong divine necessity is unconditional necessity, whereas weak divine necessity is said to be conditional: that God exists necessarily if God exists. The necessity in both cases is supposed to be broadly logical modality. In that case, the distinction between strong and weak divine necessity collapses. Since a necessary truth follows from any proposition, it seems that if God has weak necessity, then he has strong necessity. So while it makes sense to distinguish between God's broadly logically necessary existence and his merely factually necessary existence, it makes no sense to distinguish between God's strong and weak necessary existence. Any distinction here does not lie in the necessity of God's existence but in something like the evidence for God's existence. If we have reason to think that God exists, then we have reason to think that he exists necessarily; but if we have no such reason, we may not have grounds for affirming God's necessary existence.

[11] Al-Fārābī, "Treatise on answers to questions asked of him," in *Alfārābī's Philosophische Abhandlungen*, ed. F. Dieterici (Leiden: Brill, 1890), 57.

[12] On the basis of a curious blend of Aristotelian metaphysics and neo-Platonism, Fārābī held that the world emanates necessarily from the being of God and is therefore necessary *ab alio,* in contrast to God, who is alone necessary *per se*. Aquinas adopts this terminology. For exposition see my *Cosmological Argument*, 80–83, 86–88.

Fārābī's conception of absolutely necessary existence lay at the heart of Anselm's ontological argument: if God's non-existence is logically impossible, then it follows that he must exist.[13] As Anselm writes,

> For it is possible to conceive of a being which cannot be conceived not to exist; and this is greater than one which can be conceived not to exist. Hence, if that than which nothing greater can be conceived can be conceived not to exist, it is not that than which nothing greater can be conceived. But this is an irreconcilable contradiction. There is, then, so truly a being than which nothing greater can be conceived to exist, that it cannot even be conceived not to exist; and this being thou art, O Lord, our God.[14]

On this view God is not merely factually necessary, but logically necessary in his being. This concept of God as a logically necessary being came to dominate Western conceptions of God, featuring prominently in the works of thinkers like Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Clarke.

Powerful philosophical and theological reasons can be given for taking God's existence but logically necessary, in his being.[15] Philosophically, whether or not one regards the ontological argument as a successful piece of natural theology, Anselm was right in thinking the conception of God as a being than which a greater cannot be conceived to imply his necessary existence in the logical sense, since logically contingent existence is not as great as necessary existence.[16] As many contemporary thinkers have observed, even if existence itself is not a property, the necessity of one's existence is a property, and a great-making one at that. Moreover, various arguments of natural theology, to be discussed in the sequel,[17] if successful, go to establish the existence of a logically necessary being. Leibniz's cosmological argument from contingency, for example, terminates in a

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[13] Anselm's argument was foreshadowed by ibn Sīnā, who wrote, "The necessary being is that which, if assumed to be non-existent, involves a contradiction. The possible being is that which may be assumed to be non-existent or existent without involving a contradiction (Ibn Sīnā, *Al-Najāt Fi al-Hikmah al-Manṭiqīyyah wa al-Tabī'ah al-Ilāhīyyah*, 2nd ed., ed. Muhie al-din Sabri al-Kurdi [Cairo: al-Saada Press, 1938], 224).

[14] Anselm, *Proslogion* 3.

[15] See, for example, Alexander R. Pruss and Joshua L. Rasmussen, *Necessary Existence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), chaps. 3–8; Brian Leftow, "Necessity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Philosophical Theology,* ed. Charles Taliaferro and Chad Meister (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 15–30; Robert Merrihew Adams, "Divine Necessity," *Journal of Philosophy* 80 (1983): 741–752.

[16] Thus, Nagasawa takes necessary existence, in contrast even to such great-making properties as omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence, to be entailed by perfect being theism (Yujin Nagasawa, *Maximal God: A New Defence of Perfect Being Theism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017], 33, 204). A striking lacuna in Nagasawa's defense of the ontological argument is any consideration of objections to perfect being theism aimed at showing that necessary existence, like other great-making properties, is either internally incoherent or incompatible with other attributes of God. Without the assumption that necessary existence belongs to perfect being theism, most of the merits of perfect being theism that Nagasawa identifies evaporate (28–34).

[17] See "Excursus on Natural Theology," in this *Systematic Philosophical Theology*, vol. IIb.

logically necessary being, for only such a being can supply an adequate answer to the question, "Why is there something rather than nothing?" A conceptualist argument for God's existence as a ground for the existence of abstract objects like mathematical entities also entails the existence of a logically necessary being in order to ground the realm of necessarily existing abstract objects. The moral argument for God as a foundation for the objectivity of moral values and duties leads naturally to such a being, since many moral values and principles are not plausibly logically contingent.

Theologically speaking, a God who just happens to exist (even eternally and without cause) seems less satisfactory religiously than one whose non-existence is impossible. An attitude of worship and adoration toward God seems inappropriate if God exists accidentally and possesses contingently various great-making properties.[18] Hoffman and Rosenkrantz rightly maintain that in light of the degree of awesomeness of its attributes, a maximally great being "is maximally worthy of worship and reverence."[19] Mere factual necessity does not seem to capture the fullness of divine being.

3.3 Coherence of God's Necessary Existence

3.3.1 Criticism of Logically Necessary Existence

Since the critiques of Hume and Kant, however, philosophers have until recently widely rejected the notion of God as a logically necessary being. Hume's brief criticism may be found in Part IX of his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*. "Whatever we conceive as existent, we can also conceive as non-existent. There is no being, therefore, whose non-existence implies a contradiction." Since we can without contradiction conceive of

[18] A point made by J. N. Findlay, "Can God's Existence be Disproved?," in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 47–55. Committed to "a contemporary outlook" on modal notions, Findlay took his argument to be a decisive disproof of God's existence (54). For "modern views make it self-evidently absurd (if they don't make it ungrammatical) to speak of such a Being and attribute existence to him. It was indeed an ill day for Anselm when he hit up on his famous proof. For on that day he not only laid bare something that is of the essence of an adequate religious object, but also something that entails its necessary nonexistence" (55). Intriguingly, Findlay later gave up his claim that a being worthy of worship could not have necessary existence, though as a neo-Platonist he took the proper object of religious attitudes to be an abstract object like Goodness, Beauty, and Truth (J. N. Findlay, *Ascent to the Absolute* [London: Allen and Unwin, 1970]). See the interesting discussion in Jordan Howard Sobel, *Logic and Theism: Arguments for and against Beliefs in God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 9–18, 143). Sobel thinks that while the concept of God of philosophical theologians includes both necessary existence and essential perfection, the concept of popular religion is confined to a being worthy of worship. He gives no evidence, however, that laymen are so restricted in their implicit beliefs. For evidence from the cognitive sciences to the contrary, see Nagasawa, *Maximal God*, 25–28.

[19] Joshua Hoffman and Gary S. Rosenkrantz, "Divine Attributes" in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021), https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119009924.eopr0106.:

any being as non-existent, we lie under no necessity of supposing God to be necessarily existent "in the same manner as we lie under a necessity of always conceiving twice two to be four. The words, therefore, *necessary existence*, have no meaning; or, which is the same thing, none that is consistent."[20]

The thrust of Kant's criticism, which may be found in the section entitled "The Impossibility of an Ontological Proof of the Existence of God," of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, is to show that the existence of God cannot be inferred from the concept of absolutely necessary existence.[21] Such a critique does not invalidate the concept of a necessary being as such, which Kant grants may be defined as something the non-existence of which is impossible. His critique of the ontological argument, rather, is the same as Hume's: the existence of God can be denied without contradiction. "But if we say 'There is no God,'. . . there is . . . not the least contradiction in such a judgment."[22] That is because "if the predicate of a judgment is rejected *together with* the subject, no internal contradiction can result, and this holds no matter what the predicate may be. . . . I cannot form the least concept of a thing which, should it be rejected with all its predicates, leaves behind a contradiction."[23] Ironically, Kant holds that existence is not a real property which is predicated of things. "If, now, we take the subject (God) with all its predicates . . . and say 'God is', or 'There is a God,' we attach no new predicate to the concept of God, but only posit the subject in itself with all its predicates, and indeed posit it as being an *object* that stands in relation to my *concept*."[24] If Kant is correct, then there can be no objection to taking "God exists" to be a synthetic, necessary truth, even though its denial is not a contradiction. Therefore, however subversive his critique may prove to be for the ontological argument, it does nothing to invalidate the concept of a logically necessary being.

Brian Leftow observes that "In the dark night of post-Kantian Europe, it is hard to find a philosopher who considered the matter" of logical divine necessity.[25] As late as 1971, Robert Adams could observe that it is "widely believed" that the claim that no proposition asserting the existence of something can be logically necessary "has been established so conclusively

[20] David Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion,* ed. Norman Kemp Smith, The Library of Liberal Arts (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1947), 189–190.
[21] *Critique of Pure Reason* A592/B602–A603/B631 (Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason"*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith [London: Macmillan, 1929], 500–507).
[22] Kant,*"Critique"*, 502.
[23] Kant, 502–503 (my emphasis).
[24] Kant, 505.
[25] Leftow, "Necessity," 15. Sadly, most of German theology still languishes in that shadow. By contrast, among analytic theist philosophers, says Leftow, divine necessity in some form is "the consensus view."

that arguments for the logically necessary existence of a real thing can be rejected out of hand, without further examination, on the ground that such logically necessary existence is known to be impossible."[26] It was often said that to speak of a logically necessary being is flatly a category mistake; propositions are logically necessary or contingent with respect to their truth value, but beings are no more necessary or contingent than they are true or false. If one replied that the theist means to hold that the proposition *God exists* is necessarily true, then the response was that existential propositions are uniformly contingent. Besides, the proposition *God does not exist* is not a contradiction, so that *God exists* cannot be logically necessary. Moreover, many philosophers insisted that the distinction between necessary/contingent truth is merely a result of linguistic convention, so that it becomes merely conventional to assert that God necessarily exists.

3.3.2 Broadly Logically Necessary Existence

Philosophical reflection during the second half of the twentieth century has largely overturned these critiques.[27] The recovery and development of modal logic, widely neglected since the time of medieval logicians, has proved revolutionary.[28] Pruss and Rasmussen point out that "Using modal

[26] Robert Merrihew Adams, "Has It Been Proved That All Real Existence Is Contingent?," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 8 (1971): 284.

[27] For a thorough review, see Pruss and Rasmussen, *Necessary Existence*, chap. 9; cf. chap. 3.4.1; 3.4.6–7; cf. Joshua Rasmussen, "Could God Fail to Exist?," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 8, no. 3 (2016):159–177; Brian Leftow, *Anselm's Argument: Divine Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), chaps. 6–7. Adams had responded to the Humean objection based on the conceivability of the non-existence of anything, the Kantian objection based on the denial that existence is a defining property of any concept, and the conventionalist objection based on the independence of reality from human language. Adams argued that in each case, the objection begs the question against an argument for the logically necessary existence of some being and so fails as a defeater of that conclusion. Pruss and Rasmussen's claim is even stronger. Suppose that the systematic theologian adopts without argument the view that God's existence is logically necessary. They claim that such a person, when confronted with a Humean–Kantian objection, can then construct a parity argument *for* the existence of a necessary being, resulting in stalemate. For example, he could argue that if conceivability implies possibility, then since we can conceive of the existence of a necessary being, it follows that such a being is possible (and therefore, given the resources of modern modal logic, actual). They also note that "it may turn out" – just as Fārābī claimed – "that a necessary being has a nature, such that if one were to fully conceive it, one could not conceive of it as non-existent. Nothing we do conceive rules that option out" (Pruss and Rasmussen, *Necessary Existence,* 179). As for the argument that the negation of any existential proposition does not imply a contradiction and is therefore possible, they reply that such an objection is based upon a flawed account of the modality involved (viz., broad logical modality as opposed to narrow logical modality). The objection that a necessary being cannot cause contingent beings is predicated upon the unjustified assumption that all causation is deterministic. Finally, the claim that one incurs additional costs by adding necessary existence as well as contingent existence to one's ontology is outweighed by the cogent arguments on behalf of necessary existence, which they exposit in chaps. 3–8 – not to mention the valuable theological payoff of maximizing God's greatness.

[28] For an introduction to modal notions, see Leftow, *God and Necessity*, chap. 1, "Modal Basics." I do not mean to endorse Leftow's attempt to ground modality in God. See my review of *God and Necessity*, by Brian Leftow, *Faith and Philosophy* 30, no. 4 (2013): 462–470; William Lane Craig, review of *God and Necessity*, by Brian Leftow, *Philosophy* 89, no. 347 (2014): 171–176.

logic, we may express propositions about contingent and necessary things without presupposing that there is any such property as *existence*, *necessary existence*, or *contingent existence*."[29] So, for example, we may translate "*C* exists contingently" as: $\exists x\ (x = C)\ \&\ \sim\Box\ \exists x\ (x = C)$.[30] Using the language of contemporary modal logic, we can thus express assertions of necessary existence independently of whether there is a property of existence, so that Kant's objection falls by the wayside.

The development of possible worlds semantics to express modal logical claims has provided a useful means of expressing the theist's claim that God exists necessarily.[31] To say that God is a logically necessary being is to say that God exists in every possible world ("God" in this case being a proper name and, hence, rigidly designating its referent, that is to say, picking out the same entity in every possible world in which it exists). In other words, the proposition *God exists* is true in every possible world. There is no good reason to think that such an existential proposition cannot be true in every possible world, for many philosophers make precisely similar claims about the necessary existence of various abstract objects like numbers, properties, propositions, and so forth.[32] Though abstract, such objects are thought by many philosophers to exist, in Plantinga's words, just as serenely as your most solidly concrete object.[33] Thus, it would be

[29] Pruss and Rasmussen, *Necessary Existence,* 58.

[30] The symbolic formulation may be read, "There is something identical to *C,* but it is not necessarily the case that there is something identical to *C*."

[31] See the ground-breaking work of Saul Kripke, "Semantical Considerations on Modal Logic," in *Reference and Modality*, ed. Leonard Linsky (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 63–72. For a clear articulation of theistic modal claims see Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974). Plantinga has opined that every theologian needs to put in a store of modal logic.

[32] See, for example, Bob Hale, *Necessary Beings: An Essay on Ontology, Modality, and the Relations between Them* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 175–177. In response to a reviewer's complaint about the complete absence in a book on necessary beings of any discussion of God, Hale says that the kind of argument he gives for the necessary existence of properties and numbers does not lend itself to a proof of God's necessary existence (5). The rejection of natural theology does not, however, excuse overlooking God's status as a necessary being.

[33] Plantinga, *Nature of Necessity,* 132. I am therefore perplexed at the attitude of Sobel, who would restrict necessary existence to beings not worthy of worship. Sobel is willing to countenance the necessary existence of not only abstract objects like numbers but, apparently, even of concrete objects like a stoplight, so long as they are not worthy of worship (Sobel, *Logic and Theism*, 129). He says, "The problem is that it seems to many to be a firm modal intuition that there are possible worlds in which there are. . . no *such* powerful, loving, or wise beings" (130). This consideration seems obviously susceptible to a parity argument. Moreover, if one is going to countenance the necessary existence not only of *abstracta* but also of *concreta* like stoplights, it seems ad hoc to rule out a necessary being's having the properties of being powerful, loving, and wise. But Sobel insists, "It seems to me obvious that no being that had properties that made it an object worthy of worship could also have necessary existence. . . . For it *does* seem to me that a necessary being would need to be of the nature of a Form or of an abstract entity or the stoplight, and that there is no way in which the existence of any other kind of being could be necessary" (136; cf. 143). Sobel admits that this is merely his "modal opinion": "There is no possibility of coercive demonstration here. But it does seem to many that only things such as numbers and Forms have necessary existence, and that no such things qualify for what would be God's office" (137). We may agree that no abstract object could be God, but no reason has been given to think that only causally effete objects exist necessarily.

special pleading to privilege these objects with necessary existence while denying the possibility of God's existing necessarily.

Furthermore, the modality operative in possible worlds semantics is not strict logical necessity/possibility, but broad logical necessity/possibility. Strictly speaking, there is no logical impossibility in the proposition *The Prime Minister is a prime number*; but we should not want to say, therefore, that there is a possible world in which this proposition is true. Broad logical possibility is usually construed in terms of actualizability and is therefore often understood as metaphysical possibility.[34] There are no clear criteria which can be applied mechanically to determine whether a proposition is metaphysically necessary/impossible. One chiefly has to rely on intuition or conceivability.[35] Propositions which are not strictly logically contradictory may nonetheless be metaphysically impossible, for example, *My desk could have been made of ice* or *Socrates could have been a hippopotamus*. Similarly, propositions need not be tautologous (like *If it is raining, then it is raining*) or analytic (like *Even numbers are divisible by two*) in order to be metaphysically necessary; for example, *Gold has the atomic number 79, Whatever begins to exist has a cause,* or *Everything that has a size has a shape*. Intuitions may differ over whether some proposition is metaphysically necessary/impossible. Thus, with respect to the proposition *God exists,* the fact that the negation of this proposition is not a contradiction in no way shows that the proposition is not metaphysically necessary. Similarly, the proposition that *Nothing exists* is not a logical contradiction, but that does not show that the proposition is broadly logically possible. If one has some reason to think that a metaphysically necessary being exists, then it

[34] Following Kripke, "Naming and Necessity," in *Semantics of Natural Language*, ed. Donald Davidson and Gilbert Harman (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1972), 253–55. Hale reports, "Few, if any, philosophers now. . . would seriously claim that all necessities are analytic or conceptual truths. It is widely accepted that there are non-conceptual necessities which can be known only a posteriori" (Hale, *Necessary Beings*, 116). Leftow explains that narrow logical modality is, in fact, explained by broad or metaphysical modality, for when it is said, for example, that a contradiction *cannot* be true, the modality at issue here cannot, on pain of circularity or infinite regress, be narrow logical modality but must be metaphysical modality. Modal concepts of this sort must be primitive (Leftow, "Necessity," 20–21).

[35] Thomas Morris points out, moreover, that the existence of an Anselmian God can drastically affect our modal intuitions: "For the Anselmian holds that in addition to existing in all possible worlds, God exemplifies necessarily the properties of omnipotence, omniscience, and goodness. Because of this, God has the unique ontological role of being a delimiter of possibility. To put it simply, some maximal groupings of propositions which, if *per impossible*, God did not exist would constitute possible worlds, do not count as genuinely possible worlds due to the constraints placed on possibility by the nature of the creator. Certain worlds can be described with full consistency in first order logic but are such that, for example, their moral qualities preclude their even possibly being actualized or allowed by an Anselmian God" (Thomas V. Morris, "Necessary Beings," in *Anselmian Explorations: Essays in Philosophical Theology* [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987], 184; cf. Thomas V. Morris, "The Necessity of God's Goodness," in *Anselmian Explorations*, 47–69).

would be question-begging to reject this conclusion solely on the grounds that it seems possible that nothing should exist.[36]

Finally, as for the conventionalist theory of necessity, such a construal of modal notions is not only unjustified but enormously implausible. As Plantinga points out,[37] the linguistic conventionalist appears to confuse sentences with propositions. Sentences are linguistic entities composed of words; propositions are the information content expressed by declarative sentences. We can imagine situations in which the sentence "Either God exists or he does not" would not have expressed the proposition it in fact does and so might have been neither necessary nor true; but that goes no distance toward proving that the proposition it does express is neither necessary nor true. Moreover, it seems quite incredible to think that the necessity of this proposition is in any wise affected by our determination to use words in a certain way. Could it really be the case that God both exists and does not exist?

3.4 Concluding Remarks

In summary, while the Scriptures give ample ground for taking God to exist necessarily in at least an Aristotelian sense, the requirements of perfect being theology rightly propel the Christian theologian to affirm a more exalted conception of God's necessary existence: that of a metaphysically necessary being, one that exists in every possible world. Objections to such a conception are now widely recognized to be failures and are therefore obsolete. The Christian theologian should not be deterred by them. We may agree with Leftow that "the doctrine of divine absolute necessity may well deserve the wide adherence it has found."[38] The conception of God as a necessary being in a broadly logical sense seems a coherent notion which properly belongs to Christian theism.[39]

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[36] See Adams, "Has It Been Proved?," 284–291.

[37] See remarks of Alvin Plantinga, "Self-Profile," in *Alvin Plantinga*, ed. James E. Tomberlin and Peter Van Inwagen (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1985), 71–73. Adams, remarking that "It seems to me that the conviction that reality is not dependent on our language gives to those who hold it less reason for rejecting the possibility of logically necessary real existence than it gives for rejecting the doctrine that logically necessary truths merely reflect our use of words," notes that J. N. Findlay abandoned his earlier conventionalism with respect to modality in his *The Transcendence of the Cave* (Adams, "Has It Been Proved?," 291). Findlay's change of mind in this regard was not unusual; Leftow observes that "conventionalism is a tough sell these days" (Leftow, "Necessity," 27).

[38] Leftow, "Necessity," 30.

[39] I am grateful to Josh Rasmussen for discussion of issues involved in this section.

4
Aseity

Aseity (from the Latin *a se* "by itself") is God's self-existence or independence. God does not merely exist in every possible world (as great as that is) but, even more greatly, he exists in every world wholly independently of anything else. Moreover, God is unique in his aseity; all other things exist *ab alio* (through another).[1] In virtue of his aseity, God is, in Brian Leftow's words, "the sole ultimate reality."[2]

4.1 Biblical Data Concerning Divine Aseity

The conception of God as the sole ultimate reality is firmly rooted in Scripture, Church tradition, and perfect being theology.[3] The biblical witness to God's sole ultimacy is both abundant and clear. Undoubtedly one of the most important biblical texts, both theologically and historically, in this

[1] Einar Bøhn takes divine aseity to mean simply that God is uncreated, self-sufficient, and existentially independent of all things distinct from himself and so not to entail what he calls divine foundationalism, the thesis that God is the first cause and fundamental ground of all things distinct from God himself (Einar Duenger Bøhn, *God and Abstract Objects* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019], 2). But since aseity is a uniquely divine attribute, what is sometimes called an incommunicable attribute of God, and is so essentially, I understand divine aseity to entail divine foundationalism and so do not distinguish them.

[2] Brian Leftow, *God and Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3–5.

[3] For discussion see my *God and Abstract Objects: The Coherence of Theism III: Aseity* (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 2017), chap. 2; for a semi-popular account see my *God Over All: Divine Aseity and the Challenge of Platonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), chap. 2.

Systematic Philosophical Theology: On God: Attributes of God, Volume IIa, First Edition.
William Lane Craig.
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regard is the prologue of the Gospel of John. Speaking of the pre-incarnate Christ as the Logos or Word (1.14), John[4] writes,

> In the beginning was the Word,
> and the Word was with God,
> and the Word was God.
> He was in the beginning with God.
>
> All things came into being through him,
> and without him not one thing came into being (1.1–3).

"All things" (*panta*) connotes all things taken severally, not simply the Whole. Of course, God is implicitly exempted from inclusion in "all things," since he has already been said to have been (*ēn*) in the beginning (*en archē*) (v. 1). God and the Logos are not the subject of becoming or coming into being, but of being *simpliciter*. They simply were in the beginning. Everything other than God and the divine Logos "came into being" (*egeneto*) through the Logos. The verb is the aorist form of *ginomai*, whose primary meaning is "to become" or "to originate." V. 3 thus carries the weighty metaphysical implication that there are no eternal entities apart from God. Rather everything that exists, with the exception of God himself, is the product of temporal becoming.

The verb *ginomai* also has the meaning "to be created" or "to be made." This meaning emerges in v. 3 through the denomination of the agent (*di' autou*) responsible for things' coming into being. The preposition *dia* + genitive indicates the agency by means of which a result is produced. The Logos, then, is said to be the one who has created all things and brought them into being. A second, equally significant metaphysical implication of v. 3 thus emerges: only God is self-existent; everything else exists through another, namely, through the divine Logos. God is thus the ground of being of everything else.

Jn 1.3 is thus fraught with metaphysical significance, for taken *prima facie* it tells us that God alone exists eternally and *a se*. It entails that there are no objects of any sort, abstract or concrete, which are co-eternal with God and uncreated by God via the Logos.

Partisans of uncreated abstract objects, if they are to be biblical, must therefore maintain that the domain of John's quantifiers is restricted in some way, quantifying, for example, only over concrete objects.[5] The issue

[4] I use the name of the received author of the fourth Gospel without commitment to its actual authorship or to the evangelist's authorship of the prologue.

[5] See, for example, the claim of the Christian Platonist Peter van Inwagen, "Opening Statement," in *Do Numbers Exist? A Debate about Abstract Objects,* ed. Tyron Goldschmidt, Little Debates about Big Questions (New York: Routledge, 2024), 3–11.

is a subtle one, easily misunderstood. The question is *not*: did John have in mind abstract objects when he wrote *panta di' autou egeneto*? Probably not. But neither did he have in mind quarks, galaxies, and black holes; yet he would take such things and countless other things, were he informed about them, to lie within the domain of his quantifiers. The question is not what John thought lay in the domain of his quantifiers. The question, rather, is: did John intend the domain of his quantifiers to be unrestricted, once God is exempted? It is very likely that he did. For not only is God's unique status as the only eternal, uncreated being typical for Judaism,[6] but John himself identifies the Logos alone as existing with God and being God in the beginning. Creation of everything else through the Logos then follows. The salient point here is that the unrestrictedness of the domain of the quantifiers is rooted, not in the type of objects thought to be in the domain, but in one's doctrine of God as the only uncreated being.

But was John, in fact, ignorant of the relation between abstract objects and divine creation when he wrote vv. 1–3, as we have assumed? It is, in fact, far from clear that the author of John's prologue was innocent concerning abstract objects and their relation to the Logos. For, as we have seen,[7] the doctrine of the divine, creative Logos was widespread in Middle Platonism,[8] and the similarities between John's Logos doctrine and that of the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Philo (20 B.C.–A.D. 50) are numerous and striking.[9] Of particular interest is the role of the Logos as the instrumental cause of creation. The use of *dia* + genitive to express instrumental creation is not derived from Wisdom literature but is an earmark of Middle Platonism; indeed, so much so that scholars of this movement are wont

[6] There is in the Judaism of John's day a bright dividing line which separates God ontologically from everything else, a bifurcation which Richard Bauckham attempts to capture by the term "transcendent uniqueness." Bauckham observes that so-called intermediate figures in Judaism fall into one of two categories: (1) beings which are supernatural but nonetheless created, like angels, and (2) personifications of aspects of God himself which have no independent existence, such as God's Word and God's Wisdom. God's status as the sole ultimate reality comes to practical expression in the Jewish restriction of worship as properly directed toward God alone. According to Bauckham this restriction "most clearly signaled the distinction between God and all other reality" (Richard Bauckham, "God Crucified," in *Jesus and the God of Israel: "God Crucified" and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2008], 11; cf. Richard Bauckham, "Biblical Theology and the Problems of Monotheism," in *God of Israel,* 60–106). Citing Bauckham's work, Chris Tilling reports that the majority of scholars find in early Judaism a strict monotheism that "draws a sharp line between God and everything else" (Chris Tilling, "Problems with Ehrman's Interpretive Categories," in *How God Became Jesus*, ed. Michael F. Bird [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014], 129).

[7] Recall our discussion of divine incorporeality, *supra*, 8–10.

[8] For references see Gregory E. Sterling, "'Day One': Platonizing Exegetical Traditions of Genesis 1:1–5 in John and Jewish Authors" (paper presentation, Philo section of the Society of Biblical Literature, San Antonio, TX, November 20, 2004).

[9] See Jutta Leonhardt-Balzer, "Der Logos und die Schöpfung: Steiflichter bei Philo (Op 20–25) und im Johannesprolog (Joh 1, 1–18)," in *Kontexte des Johannesevangeliums*, ed. Jörg Frey and Udo Schnelle, WUNT 175 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 318.

to speak of its "prepositional metaphysics," whereby various prepositional phrases are employed to express causal categories.[10] Philo identifies the four Aristotelian causes by these prepositional phrases, stating that "that through which" (*to di' hou*) expresses creation by the Logos.[11]

The similarities between Philo and John's doctrines of the Logos are so numerous and close that most Johannine scholars, while not willing to affirm John's direct dependence on Philo, do recognize that the author of the prologue of John's Gospel shares with Philo a common intellectual tradition of Platonizing interpretation of Genesis chapter one.

Now while John does not tarry to reflect on the role of the divine Logos causally prior to creation, this pre-creation role features prominently in Philo's Logos doctrine. Recall that for Middle Platonists, the intelligible world (*kosmos noētos*) served as a model for the creation of the sensible world (*kosmos oratos*). But for a Jewish monotheist like Philo, the realm of Ideas does not exist independently of God but as the contents of his mind. The intelligible world may be thought of as either the causal product of the divine mind or simply as the divine mind itself actively engaged in thought.[12] Especially noteworthy is Philo's insistence that the world of Ideas cannot exist anywhere but in the divine Logos. Just as the ideal architectural plan of a city exists only in the mind of the architect, so the ideal world exists solely in the mind of God.

On Philo's doctrine, then, there is no realm of independently existing abstract objects. According to Runia, while not part of the created realm, "the κόσμος νοητός, though eternal and unchanging, must be considered dependent for its existence on God."[13] Preoccupied as John is with the incarnation of the Logos, he does not linger over the pre-creatorial function of the Logos, but given the provenance of the Logos doctrine, he may well have been aware of the role of the Logos in grounding the intelligible realm as well as his role in creating the realm of temporal concrete objects.

However this may be, reflection on Jn 1.1–3 leads to the conclusion that the author of the prologue of John's Gospel conceives of God as the creator of everything apart from himself. There are no uncreated, independently existing, eternal objects, for God exists uniquely *a se*.

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[10] David T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the "Timaeus" of Plato* (Amsterdam: Free University of Amsterdam, 1983), 140–143; Sterling, "'Day One'."

[11] Philo, *On the Cherubim* 125–127. References to the Logos as the instrumental cause of creation are prevalent in Philo. Runia provides the following list: *On the Creation of the World* 16–20; *Allegorical Interpretation* 3.9; *On the Cherubim* 28; *On the Sacrifices of Abel and Cain* 8; *On the Unchangeableness of God* 57; *On the Confusion of Tongues* 62; *On the Migration of Abraham* 6; *On Flight and Finding* 12, 95; *On Dreams* 2.45; *The Special Laws* 1.81.

[12] Philo, *On the Creation of the World* 16–20, 24.

[13] Runia, *Philo and the "Timaeus,"* 138.

Consider as well the Pauline witness. The same Hellenistic Judaism, epitomized by Philo, that forms the background of John's prologue also finds echoes in Paul's statements on God's being the source of all things. Consider the following representative Pauline texts:

> there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist (1 Cor 8.6 NRSV).
>
> For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God (1 Cor 11.12 NRSV).
>
> For from him and through him and to him are all things (Rom 11.36 NRSV).
>
> He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation; for by him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him (Col 1.15–16 NRSV).

Commenting on the background of Rom 11.36, Douglas Moo observes, "The concept of God as the source (*ek*), sustainer (*dia*), and goal (*eis*) of all things is particularly strong among the Greek Stoic philosophers. Hellenistic Jews picked up this language and applied it to Yahweh; and it is probably, therefore, from the synagogue that Paul borrows this formula."[14] Stoic thought is the more distant progenitor, however; more immediately we find here variations on the prepositional metaphysics of Middle Platonism that Philo adopted. Noting how unusual for Paul such prepositional formulations are, Richard Horsley has argued that a Philonic provenance for Paul's expressions is especially evident in Paul's Corinthian correspondence.[15] He shows that "numerous passages in Philo's writings provide an analogy for nearly every aspect of the Corinthians' religious language and viewpoint."[16] He comments,

> I Cor. 8.6 is an adaptation of the traditional Hellenistic Jewish form of predication regarding the respective creative and soteriological roles of God and Sophia/Logos, which Philo or his predecessors had adapted from a Platonic philosophical formula concerning the primal principles of the universe. What was already a fundamental tenet of the Hellenistic Jewish

[14] Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 743. Dunn conveniently provides excerpts of parallel texts (James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, Word Biblical Commentary 38B [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988], 702).
[15] Richard A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 119–120; for detailed analysis see Richard A. Horsley, "Gnosis in Corinth: I Corinthians 8.1–6," *New Testament Studies* 27 (1980): 32–51.
[16] Horsley, "Gnosis in Corinth," 43.

> religion expressed in the book of Wisdom appears in more philosophical formulation in Philo; that God is the ultimate Creator and final Cause of the universe, and that Sophia/Logos is agent (and paradigm) of creation or the instrumental (and formal) cause.[17]

Notice that whereas God is regarded as the efficient and final cause of the universe of created things, Sophia/Logos serves as the instrumental cause and the formal cause (or paradigm) of creation, this latter role being specifically the source or ground of the *kosmos noētos* or ideal world. Paul's innovation is that he substitutes *Christos* for *Sophia/Logos*, having "Christ take over what were the functions of Sophia, according to the *gnosis* of the Corinthians."[18] In ascribing to Christ the creative role of the Logos, Paul is affirming that everything apart from God and his Logos has been created by God through Christ. The domain of Paul's quantifiers is unlimited: everything other than God is the result of divine creation.

Rom 11.36 is thus, in Moo's words, "a declaration of God's ultimacy."[19] Dunn concurs: "Where the focus is so exclusively on the supreme majesty and self-sufficiency of God, the Stoic type formula provides a fitting climax: he is the source, medium, and goal of *everything*, the beginning, middle, and end of all that is."[20]

The biblical witness to divine aseity and God's being the sole ultimate reality is thus impressive. God is affirmed to exist independently of everything else and to be alone eternal in his being. Everything apart from God is said to belong to the realm of temporal becoming and to have been created by God through Christ, the divine Logos.

4.2 Testimony of the Church

The conviction that God is the sole ultimate reality eventually attained credal status at the Council of Nicaea. In language redolent of the prologue to the fourth Gospel and of Paul, the Council affirmed:

> I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible;
>
> And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father, through whom all things came into being.

[17] Horsley, 46.
[18] Horsley, 51.
[19] Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 740.
[20] Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 704.

The phrase "Maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible" is Pauline (Col 1.16), and the expression "through whom all things came into being" Johannine (Jn 1.3). At face value the Council seems to affirm that God alone is uncreated and that everything else was created by him.

An examination of ante-Nicene theological reflection on divine aseity confirms the *prima face* reading. At the heart of the Arian controversy which occasioned the convening of the Council of Nicaea lay a pair of terminological distinctions prevalent among the Church Fathers: *agenētos*/*genētos* and *agennētos*/*gennētos*.[21] The word pair *agenētos*/*genētos* derives from the Greek verb *ginomai*, which means to become or to come into being. *Agenētos* means unoriginated or uncreated, in contrast to *genētos*, that which is created or originated. The second word pair *agennētos*/*gennētos* derives from a different verb *gennaō*, which means to beget. That which is *agennētos* is unbegotten, while that which is *gennētos* is begotten. These distinctions allowed the Fathers to hold that while both God the Father and God the Son are *agenētos*, only the Father is *agennētos*.

Like their Arian opponents, the ante-Nicene and Nicene Church Fathers rejected any suggestion that there might exist *agenēta* apart from God alone.[22] According to patristic scholar Harry Austryn Wolfson,[23] the Church Fathers all accepted the following three principles:

1. God alone is uncreated.
2. Nothing is co-eternal with God.
3. Eternality implies deity.

Each of these principles implies that there are no *agenēta* apart from God alone.

But lest it be suggested that *abstracta* were somehow exempted from these principles, we should note that the ante-Nicene Church Fathers explicitly rejected the view that entities such as properties and numbers are *agenēta*. The Fathers were familiar with the metaphysical worldviews of Plato and Pythagoras and agreed with them that there is one *agenētos*

[21] For a survey of texts see the discussion by George L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: SPCK, 1964), 37–55, which I follow here. See also the references in J. B. Lightfoot's "Excursus on the Words *gennēthenta ou poiēthenta* [*γεννηθέντα οὐ ποιηθέντα*]" reprinted in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series, vol. 14: *Seven Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (repr. ed., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 4–7.

[22] Justin, *Dialogue* 5; Methodius, *On Free Will* 5; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* IV.38.3; Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* V.13–15; Hippolytus, *Against Noetus* X.1; Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* X.28; Epiphanius, *Panarion* XXXIII.7.6; Athanasius, *Defense of the Nicene Definition* 7: "On the Arian symbol 'Agenetos';" Athanasius, *Discourses against the Arians* I.9.30–34; Athanasius, *On the Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia* 46–47; Athanasius, *Statement of Faith* 3.

[23] Harry A. Wolfson, "Plato's Pre-existent Matter in Patristic Philosophy," in *The Classical Tradition*, ed. Luitpold Wallach (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), 414.

from which all reality derives; but the Fathers identified this *agenētos*, not with an impersonal form or number, but with the Hebrew God, who has created all things (other than himself) *ex nihilo*.[24] If confronted by a modern-day Platonist defending an ontology which included causally effete objects which were *agenēta* and so co-eternal with God, they would have rejected such an account as blasphemous, since God is the sole and all-originating *agenētos*. Given this background to the Nicene Creed, it is virtually undeniable that the Creed means to affirm God as the Creator of everything other than himself, the sole uncreated reality.[25]

4.3 Requirements of Perfect Being Theology

In addition to the biblical and patristic witness to God's status as the sole ultimate reality, the requirements of sound systematic theology include the affirmation that God is the source of all things apart from himself. For divine aseity is a fundamental requirement of perfect being theology. As a perfect being, the greatest conceivable being, God must be the self-existent source of all reality apart from himself. For being the foundational cause of existence of other things is plausibly a great-making property, and the maximal degree of this property is to be the cause of

[24] Athenagoras, *Plea for the Christians* 15, 24; Tatian, *Address to the Greeks* IV.10–14; Methodius, *On Free Will*; Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* VI.16, 18, 19, 24, 43. Combining the Gospel of John's presentation of Christ as the pre-existent Logos with Philo of Alexandria's conception of the Logos as the mind of God in which the Platonic realm of Ideas subsists, the Greek Apologists grounded the intelligible realm in God rather than in some independent realm of self-subsisting entities like numbers or forms. According to Wolfson, every Church Father who addressed the issue rejected the view that the ideas were self-subsisting entities but instead located the intelligible world in the Logos and, hence, in the mind of God. For a discussion of texts taken from pseudo-Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Augustine, see Harry Austryn Wolfson, "The Logos and the Platonic Ideas," chap. 13 in *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, vol. 1: *Faith, Trinity, and Incarnation*, 3rd ed. rev. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

[25] Van Inwagen's attempt to avoid this conclusion is unavailing ("Opening Statement," 4–5). He has yet to come to grips with the relevant biblical data. He rightly points out that in the ancient world putative *abstracta* stood in causal relations to the physical world and that the Church Fathers did not have any awareness of van Inwagen's peculiar theory of properties. But these two facts are red herrings. Possession of causal powers was an irrelevancy in these debates. There are no grounds for thinking that if someone were to hold that numbers and properties and so on are causally effete but nonetheless just as real as elementary particles, indeed, as God himself, then it would have been theologically acceptable to hold that they exist independent of God. Such acausal *agenēta* would have been excluded along with causally related *agenēta*. There just were no *agenēta* apart from God himself.

I agree, of course, with van Inwagen that a resuscitated Church Father would not have any idea at all of what van Inwagen meant by "property" or any inkling of van Inwagen's reasons for thinking that there are such things. But what the resuscitated Church Father would and did understand is that God is the sole *agenētos* and that everything else, whatever its nature, no matter how peculiar, if it exists in the same sense that we exist, is created by God. Therefore, van Inwagen is kidding himself if he thinks that after thoroughly explaining his view to the Church Father, he would say anything else than, "'Ah, now I see what you mean by "property". It's wholly unlike anything I had ever thought of. But you're still a heretic if you say they're uncreated.' (Or other words to that effect.)" (Van Inwagen, "Opening Statement," 10).

everything else that exists.[26] God would be diminished in his greatness if he were the cause of only some of the other things that exist.

Seen in this light, divine aseity is a corollary of God's omnipotence, which certainly belongs to maximal greatness.[27] For if any being exists independently of God, then God lacks the power either to annihilate it or to create it. An omnipotent being can give and take existence as he sees fit with respect to other beings. God's power would thus be attenuated by the existence of independently existing abstract objects.

4.4 The Challenge of Platonism

The doctrine of divine aseity confronts a serious challenge from one of the oldest and most persistent of philosophical doctrines: Platonism, which holds that in addition to concrete objects like people and planets there also exist abstract objects like numbers and sets and propositions and properties.[28] Platonists maintain that such objects, though abstract and usually held to exist beyond time and space, are nonetheless every bit as real as the familiar physical objects of our daily experience. They exist necessarily, for it is inconceivable that there should exist, for example, a possible world lacking in numbers or propositions, even if that world were altogether devoid of concrete objects other than God himself. Moreover – and this is the crucial point – they exist *a se*. There is no cause of the existence of such entities; they each exist independently of one another and of God. It is this feature of Platonism, more than any other, which has troubled many Christian theists. Not only is there an infinite number of such objects (there is an infinite number of natural numbers alone), but there are higher and higher orders of infinities of such objects, infinities of infinities, so that God is utterly dwarfed by their unimaginable multitude. God finds himself amidst infinite realms of uncreated beings which exist just as necessarily and independently as he. The dependence of physical creation upon God for its existence becomes an infinitesimal triviality in comparison with the existence of the infinitude of beings that exist independently of him.

[26] A point made by Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 22.
[27] Another point made by Leftow, 22.
[28] I speak here, not of what has been called "lightweight" Platonism, but of a "heavyweight" Platonism. Lightweight Platonism treats abstract objects merely as the semantic referents of certain singular terms like proper names and definite descriptions. On lightweight Platonism abstract objects are individuals merely in the sense that Wednesdays and the whereabouts of the Prime Minister are individuals, namely, as referents of the terms "Wednesday" and "the whereabouts of the Prime Minister," but not in a sense which requires God to create such things in order for us to speak meaningfully about them. I am talking about "heavyweight" Platonism, according to which abstract objects exist just as robustly as the fundamental particles which make up the physical world.

Platonism thus entails a metaphysical pluralism which is incompatible with God's being the sole ultimate reality.

In the contemporary debate over Platonism,[29] there are principally two arguments lodged against Platonism and one argument in its favor. The two objections usually urged against Platonism are the so-called epistemological objection and the uniqueness objection.[30] The major consideration weighing in for Platonism is the so-called Indispensability Argument.[31] Whether Platonists can successfully defeat the two principal objections lodged against their view may remain a moot question here. Rather our concern is with the Indispensability Argument, for if the Indispensability Argument is sound, it will constitute a defeater of biblical theism.

4.4.1 The Indispensability Argument

Today there are a variety of Indispensability Arguments on tap. Philosopher of mathematics Mark Balaguer nicely epitomizes such arguments as follows:

> I. If a simple sentence (i.e., a sentence of the form '*a* is *F*', or '*a* is *R*-related to *b*', or. . .) is literally true, then the objects that its singular terms denote exist. Likewise, if an existential sentence is literally true, then there exist objects of the relevant kinds; e.g., if 'There is an *F*' is true, then there exist some *F*s.
>
> II. There are literally true simple sentences containing singular terms that refer to things that could only be abstract objects. Likewise, there are literally true existential statements whose existential quantifiers range over things that could only be abstract objects.
>
> III. Therefore, abstract objects exist.[32]

[29] Among Christian philosophers there are actually two contemporary debates, unfortunately often conflated, going on concerning God and abstract objects, one over the challenge of Platonism to *divine aseity*, stemming from Thomas Morris and Christopher Menzel's seminal article "Absolute Creation" in 1986, and the other over the challenge of Platonism to *divine sovereignty* or *omnipotence*, sparked by Alvin Plantinga's 1980 Aquinas Lecture "Does God Have a Nature?" at Marquette University (Thomas V. Morris and Christopher Menzel, "Absolute Creation," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 23, no 4 [1986]: 353–362; Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* [Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1980]). Because Plantinga was concerned with the challenge posed by Platonism to divine sovereignty, not divine aseity, he dismissed anti-realism as irrelevant to the discussion. For even if there are no such things as the properties of *being red* and *being colored,* for example, nevertheless it remains necessarily true that whatever is red is colored, and God can do nothing to make it otherwise. Obviously, anti-realism, however irrelevant it may be to the sovereignty debate, is nonetheless central to the aseity debate, since if there are no abstract objects, the challenge their existence would pose to divine aseity simply evaporates.

[30] Paul Benacerraf in two seminal papers initiated the discussion of these two issues. See Paul Benacerraf, "What Numbers Could Not Be," *Philosophical Review* 74, no. 1 (1965): 47–73; Paul Benacerraf, "Mathematical Truth," *Journal of Philosophy* 70, no. 19 (1973): 661–679.

[31] The seminal papers here are W. V. Quine, "On What There Is," in *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 1–19; Hilary Putnam, "The Philosophy of Logic," in Hilary Putnam, *Mathematics, Matter, and Method* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 323–357.

[32] Mark Balaguer, "Platonism in Metaphysics," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Spring 2016 Edition), §4 "The Singular Term Argument," https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/platonism.

Premise (I) states a meta-ontological criterion of ontological commitment. It does not tell us what exists, but it does claim to tell us what must exist if a sentence we assert is to be true. The claim is that singular terms (such as proper names and definite descriptions) and existential quantification are devices of ontological commitment. Premise (II) states that the denotations or referents of certain singular terms in literally true, simple sentences like, for example, "2 + 2 = 4," cannot plausibly be taken to be concrete objects of any kind. Premise (II) likewise states that there are literally true existentially quantified statements involving quantification over abstract objects like, for example, "There is a prime number between 2 and 4." Given the proffered criterion of ontological commitment, anyone who asserts such truths finds himself committed to the reality of abstract objects.

4.4.2 Responses to the Indispensability Argument

Fortunately, there is a wide range of options open to the Christian thinker in response to Platonism's challenge. The contemporary debate over Platonism finds its epicenter in the philosophy of mathematics with respect to the ontological status of mathematical objects like numbers, sets, and so forth. Taking such objects as paradigmatic abstract objects, we may lay out some of our options as follows:

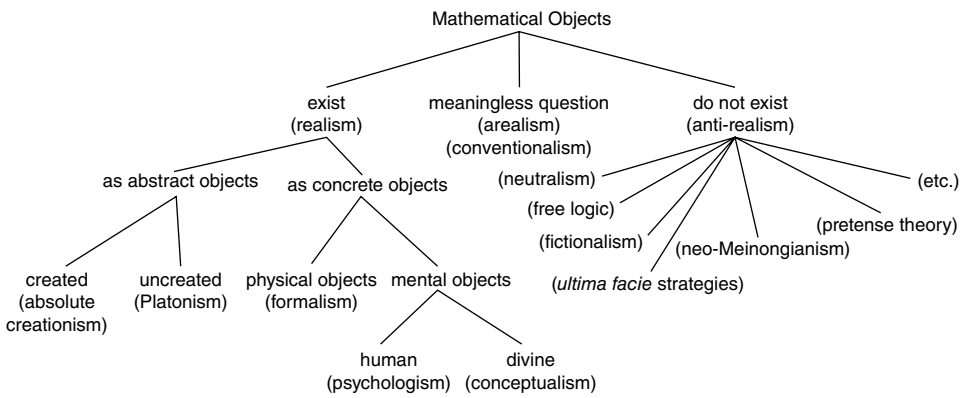

Figure 1 Options for dealing with the challenge of Platonism to divine aseity.

Looking at Figure 1, we see that the various options can be classed as *realist* (mathematical objects exist), *arealist* (there is no fact of the matter concerning the existence of mathematical objects), or *anti-realist* (mathematical objects do not exist). Further, there are two brands of realism about mathematical objects: views which take them to be *abstract* objects and views which take them to be *concrete* objects. Of realist views which consider mathematical objects to be abstract, there is in addition to Platonism a sort of modified Platonism called absolute creationism,

which holds that mathematical objects have, like concrete objects, been created by God. Concretist versions of realism are anti-Platonist views which take mathematical objects to be either *physical* objects or *mental* objects, the latter either in *human* minds or in *God's* mind. The most promising concretist view is some sort of divine conceptualism, the heir to the view of the Church Fathers.

In between realism and anti-realism about mathematical objects is arealism, the view that there just is no fact of the matter about the reality of mathematical objects. The classic version of arealism was the conventionalism of Rudolf Carnap, who held that talk of mathematical objects makes sense only within a conventionally adopted linguistic framework. Although conventionalism was motivated by a now defunct verificationism, there are contemporary philosophers who are not conventionalists but nonetheless embrace ontological arealism, according to which certain ontological questions (like "Does the number 2 exist?") just have no objective answers.

When we turn to anti-realist options, we find a cornucopia of different views. Neutralism holds that the use of singular terms and existential quantification is neutral, so that we are not ontologically committed to the existence of numbers by asserting obvious truths like "$2 < 3$."[33] Free logic, on the other hand, takes existential quantification to be ontologically committing but denies that the use of singular terms is a device of ontological commitment. Neo-Meinongianism denies that existential (or particular) quantification is ontologically committing, though it affirms that there are objects referred to by abstract singular terms like "2" – with the caveat that these objects are nonexistent! Fictionalism holds that the use of singular terms and existential quantification is ontologically committing to the objects referred to or quantified over but denies that mathematical statements like "$2 + 2 = 4$" are true. *Ultima facie* strategies hold that mathematical discourse may be taken as true without ontological commitment because it can be either taken figuratively or paraphrased so as to avoid reference to or quantification over mathematical objects. Pretense theory considers mathematical discourse to be a species of make-believe, prescribed to be imagined true, so that mathematical objects are no more real than fictional characters. And so on!

Of these options, only absolute creationism looks on the Indispensability Argument with insouciance.[34] For the absolute creationist affirms that

[33] It is important to differentiate the neutralist view from a deceptively similar view called *quantifier variance*, which holds that the existential quantifier has two different meanings, one ontologically committing and one not. I omit quantifier variance from my taxonomy because of its implausibility.

[34] See, for example, Morris and Menzel, "Absolute Creation," 353–362. For exposition and assessment, see chap. 4 of my *God and Abstract Objects* or chap. 4 of my *God Over All*.

mathematical objects are abstract objects existing in some sense apart from God, though causally dependent upon him. Accordingly, this option has appealed to some Christian theists as the best way to safeguard divine aseity. Unfortunately, absolute creationism appears to involve a vicious circularity which has come to be known as the bootstrapping objection. The problem can be simply stated with respect to the creation of properties. In order to create properties, God must already possess properties. For example, in order to create the property *being powerful* God must already possess the property of being powerful, which involves a vicious circularity. The only plausible way to avoid the bootstrapping problem, it seems, is to affirm that God can be powerful without having the property of *being powerful*. But such a solution removes any motivation for realism about properties.

One might try to escape the bootstrapping problem by appealing to the doctrine of divine simplicity, according to which God transcends the distinction between a thing and its properties. A strong doctrine of divine simplicity would avoid the vicious circularity threatening absolute creationism by denying that God has any properties; rather God is a simple being identical with his existence. Unfortunately, the doctrine of divine simplicity, given its controverted status, cannot provide a plausible escape from the problem.[35]

With their backs apparently to the wall, some absolute creationists have conceded that God does not create his own properties; but they insist that God has created all other properties. This answer, however, will either sacrifice divine aseity on the altar of Platonism or else remove any adequate rationale for Platonism. On the one hand, if the absolute creationist affirms that God's essential properties are exemplified by him logically prior to his creation of all remaining properties and so are not created by him, then we have sacrificed the doctrine of divine aseity in favor of Platonism, for this just is the theologically unacceptable position that in addition to God there exist other uncreated entities.[36] On the other hand, if the absolute

[35] See infra, chap. 5.

[36] Thus, Paul Gould and Richard Davis affirm that "God's essential platonic properties exist *a se* (i.e., they are neither created nor sustained by God, yet they *are exemplified by* the divine substance)" (Paul Gould and Richard Brian Davis, "Response to Critics," in *Beyond the Control of God? Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects*, ed. Paul Gould with articles, responses, and counter-responses by K. Yandell, R. Davis, P. Gould, G. Welty, Wm. Craig, S. Shalkowski, and G. Oppy [London: Bloomsbury, 2014], 76). But they insist that divine aseity is not sacrificed by God's exemplifying Platonic abstract properties, whether on a relational or a constituent ontology. That claim seems clearly false on a relational ontology, since on such a view God stands in relation to uncreated objects which are in no sense a part of him but are utterly separate beings. And even on a constituent ontology, where properties are taken to be parts of God, the notion of parthood involved is still cashed out in terms of God's exemplifying abstract objects which are distinct from him. Gould and Davis' exposition of their view is considerably muddied, moreover, by their curious affirmation that God's thoughts are abstract objects.

creationist affirms that explanatorily prior to his creation of properties, God has no properties but is as he is without exemplifying properties (since they have not yet been created), then we have abandoned the Platonistic ontological assay of things with respect, at least, to God. Such a move either collapses into the implausible doctrine of divine simplicity or else concedes to the anti-Platonist that in order to be, for example, powerful, God need not exemplify the property of *being powerful*.

Perhaps the absolute creationist will say that only logically posterior to his creation of properties does God come to acquire properties; prior to his creation of properties, God is, for example, powerful even though the property of *being powerful* has not yet been created. But then properties are not doing any metaphysical work, since God is already powerful before coming to exemplify *being powerful*.[37] This is to deny the standard Platonist ontological assay of things. But then the absolute creationist seems to have lost any rationale for positing the existence of such abstract objects. They are not doing any metaphysical work, as they do in the usual Platonist scheme of things. As Moltmann says, they simply enable reference for reifying expressions like "the property wisdom" or "the number 7."

Such is, in fact, Peter van Inwagen's view. Van Inwagen rejects constituent ontologies, which ascribe to particular things an ontological structure.[38] He therefore repudiates the Platonist's ontological assay of things, denying that properties are ontological constituents of things. Although van Inwagen is not an absolute creationist, nonetheless an absolute creationist who endorses van Inwagen's favored ontology could hold to the reality of abstract objects without falling prey to the bootstrapping objection because van Inwagen's favored ontology denies the typical Platonist ontological assay. So a Christian Platonist like van Inwagen ought to find absolute creationism to be an attractive option. Nevertheless, to my knowledge no one has adopted this viewpoint. Van Inwagen reports, "I am the only proponent of the Favored Ontology I am aware of,"[39] and he is not an absolute creationist! Neither do I personally find his favored ontology attractive. To my mind, having to include such metaphysically idle entities as are countenanced by van Inwagen's favored ontology ought to prompt us to call into question the premises of the Indispensability Argument that would force such ontological commitments upon us.

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[37] Just such a view is suggested by Friederike Moltmann's analysis of how we make ontological commitments in ordinary language (Friederike Moltmann, *Abstract Objects and the Semantics of Natural Language* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013]).

[38] Peter van Inwagen, "Dispensing with Ontological Levels: An Illustration," LanCog Lectures in Metaphysics 2013, *Disputatio* 6, no. 38 (2014): 41–42.

[39] Van Inwagen, "Relational vs. Constituent Ontologies," *Philosophical Perspectives* 25, no. 1 (2011): 398.

In light of the metaphysical idleness of such abstract entities, it therefore seems to me that theists would be well-advised to look elsewhere than absolute creationism for a solution to the challenge posed by Platonism to the doctrine of divine aseity. To be successful, proponents of the Indispensability Argument have to show that of all the options delineated, Platonism alone is plausible, an order so tall that probably no contemporary philosopher thinks that it can be filled. Let us consider briefly the prospects of each alternative to Platonism.[40]

4.4.2.1 Responses to Premise (II)

Consider, first, responses to the Indispensability Argument which dispute Premise (II). These responses come in realist, arealist, and anti-realist options.

4.4.2.1.1 Realist Responses

Realist versions of anti-Platonism dispute that in true mathematical sentences singular terms refer to and existential quantifiers range over things that could *only* be abstract objects. Non-Platonic realists hold that various objects normally thought to be abstract are in fact concrete. These may be taken to be either physical objects, such as marks on paper, or mental objects or thoughts, either in human minds or in God's mind. Nineteenth century philosopher of mathematics Gottlob Frege subjected the views that mathematical objects are physical objects or human thoughts to such withering criticism, however, that such views are scarcely taken seriously today.[41]

Frege's objections to formalism and psychologism – such as the intersubjectivity, necessity, and plenitude of mathematical objects – do not, however, touch divine conceptualism. With the late twentieth century renaissance of Christian philosophy divine conceptualism is once more finding articulate defenders. Alvin Plantinga, for example, locates himself in the Augustinian tradition "in thinking of numbers, properties, propositions and the rest of the Platonic host as *divine ideas*."[42]

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[40] For detailed exposition and assessment, see chaps. 5–11 of my *God and Abstract Objects* or chaps. 5–10 of my *God Over All*.

[41] Gottlob Frege, *The Foundations of Arithmetic: A Logico-Mathematical Enquiry into the Concept of Number*, trans. J. L. Austin, 2nd rev. ed. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), §I.7 (pp. 8–11); §II.26–27 (pp. 34–38).

[42] Alvin Plantinga, "Response to William Lane Craig's review of *Where the Conflict Really Lies*," *Philosophia Christi* 15 (2013): 178. Brian Leftow and Greg Welty have provided extensive defenses of this divine conceptualism (Leftow, *God and Necessity*; Greg Welty, "Theistic Conceptual Realism: The Case for Interpreting Abstract Objects as Divine Ideas" [DPhil thesis, Oxford University: 2006]; cf. Greg Welty, "Theistic Conceptual Realism," in Gould, *Beyond the Control?*, 81–111. So also Lindsay K. Cleveland, "Divine Aseity and Abstract Objects," in *T & T Clark Handbook of Analytic Theology,* ed. James M. Arcadi and James T. Turner, Jr. (London: T & T Clark, 2021), 165–179.

Unfortunately, conceptualism is not worry-free. Conceptualism requires that in virtue of his omniscience God be constantly entertaining actual thoughts corresponding to every proposition and every state of affairs.[43] This may be problematic for the theist. Graham Oppy complains that "it threatens to lead to the attribution to God of inappropriate thoughts: bawdy thoughts, banal thoughts, malicious thoughts, silly thoughts, and so forth."[44] I think that the Christian theist should take this worry very seriously. If God has the full range of thoughts that we do, then he must imagine himself, as well as everyone else, to be engaged in bawdy and malicious acts, and, moreover, rather than putting such detestable thoughts immediately out of mind as we try to do, he keeps on thinking about them. What about banal and silly thoughts? Why in the world should we think that God is constantly thinking the non-denumerable infinity of banal and silly propositions or states of affairs that we can imagine? Take the thought that for any real number *r*, *r* is distinct from the Taj Mahal. Why would God retain such inanities constantly in consciousness? Or consider false propositions like *for any real number* r, r *is identical to the Taj Mahal*. Why would God hold such a silly thought constantly in consciousness, knowing it to be false? Obviously, the concern is not that God would be incapable of keeping such a non-denumerable infinity of thoughts ever in consciousness, but rather why he would dwell on such trivialities. It is a *non sequitur* to infer that in virtue of his omniscience everything God knows he is actually thinking about.

Yet another worry for conceptualism is that concrete objects like God's thoughts do not seem suitable to play the roles normally ascribed to abstract objects. Consider properties, for example. The chief rationale behind construing properties as abstract universals rather than particulars is the supposed need for an entity that can be wholly located in diverse places. The difficulty, then, for conceptualism is that God's thoughts, as concrete objects, are not universals but particulars and so cannot be wholly present in spatially separated objects. Perhaps in response the conceptualist could say of divine thoughts what the Platonist says of abstract universals: particulars stand in some sort of relation to them in virtue of which particulars are the way they are. An immediate problem for the conceptualist is that if properties are God's thoughts, then particulars must exemplify God's thoughts. But a concrete object does not seem to be the sort of thing that is exemplifiable

[43] It is important to appreciate that conceptualism requires occurrent beliefs, not merely implicit beliefs, on God's part to serve as the referents of singular terms and the values of variables bound by the existential quantifier. On this distinction see Andrew Moon, "How to Think About Implicit (or Tacit) Beliefs" (unpublished manuscript).

[44] Graham Oppy, "Response to Welty," in Gould, *Beyond the Control?*, 105.

any more than it can be a universal, since concrete objects are particulars and particulars are not exemplifiable but rather exemplify. Accordingly, God's thoughts cannot be properties.

But perhaps the conceptualist could say that divine thoughts can play *the role* of properties. In substituting God's thoughts for properties, Plantinga has suggested that particulars stand to God's thoughts in a relation analogous to exemplification.[45] He appeals to Frege's notion of "falling under a concept" as the relation in which particulars stand to God's thoughts. Thus, all brown things fall under God's thought of *brown*. Things which are brown resemble each other in virtue of falling under the same concept.

Intriguing as this suggestion might be, it is problematic. In the first place, concepts are not plausibly construed as concrete objects, for they are shared by multiple thinkers in a way that thoughts are not. Concepts seem to be part of the content of our thoughts. As such they are plausibly abstract objects, if they exist at all.

Moreover, as mental states, thoughts are characterized by intentionality – being about things – not by things' falling under them. My thought of redness is about redness; it is not itself redness, nor do things fall under it. This problem can be generalized. God's thought of the number 2 is about 2. But then his thought is not 2 but something distinct from 2. 2 is what he is thinking about. But he is not thinking about his thought; he is thinking about 2. Therefore, his thought cannot be 2.

Furthermore, substituting the notion of falling under a concept for exemplifying a property seems to get the explanatory order backwards.[46] Things are not brown because they fall under God's concept *brown*, in the way that things are brown because they exemplify *brownness;* rather they fall under God's concept *brown* because they are brown. Thus, the relation of falling under a concept cannot do the work of exemplification. If this is right, then the conceptualist who wants God's thoughts to play the role of properties still has plenty work cut out for him, if his view is to commend itself as an attractive option for theists.

Or consider the suitability of divine thoughts for playing the role of mathematical sets. Plantinga suggests that sets be taken to be God's mental

[45] For the view that having a property amounts to falling under a concept see Plantinga, *Does God?*, 20–21; Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 15. Plantinga's full suggestion that falling under a divine concept can be substituted for exemplification of a property was made during discussion of my paper "In Defense of Conceptualism: A Response to Bergmann and Brower," at the University of Notre Dame.

[46] See Armstrong's critique of concept nominalism (D. M. Armstrong, *Universals and Scientific Realism*, vol. 1, *Nominalism and Realism* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978], 27). See further Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 243–244; Brian Leftow, "God and the Problem of Universals," *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, ed. Dean W. Zimmerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 2: 352.

collectings. But if sets are really particular divine thoughts, then how do we have any access to sets? The question here is not whether I have a causal connection with sets. Rather it is that sets, the real sets, are locked away in God's private consciousness, so that what we talk about and work with are not sets at all. When I collect into a unity all the pens on my desk, that set is not identical, it seems, with the set constituted by God's collecting activity. Since we have two mental collectings and since sets are God's particular collectings, the "set" I form is not identical to the set of all the pens on my desk. But if sets are determined by membership, how could they not be identical, since they have the same members?

While by no means knock-down objections to conceptualism, these worries should motivate the theist to look seriously at the wide variety of non-realist alternatives to Platonism before acquiescing too easily to a realist viewpoint.

4.4.2.1.2 Arealist Responses

Consider now the arealist response to Premise (II). As mentioned, Carnap held that once we have adopted a linguistic framework involving terminology for abstract objects like numbers, internal questions like "Is there a prime number greater than 100?" are meaningful.[47] For someone who is outside the framework, the question is meaningless. No contemporary philosopher would defend Carnap's verificationism; but his conventionalism does find an echo today in what is sometimes called ontological pluralism.[48] According to pluralists, certain ontological questions, though meaningful, do not have objective answers. Mark Balaguer and Penelope Maddy, for example, would deny that the question "Do mathematical objects exist?" has an answer that is objectively true or false.[49] On arealism there just is no fact of the matter whether or not mathematical objects exist.

Now at first blush arealism might seem a quick and easy solution to the challenge posed by Platonism to divine aseity. If there is no objective truth about whether or not mathematical objects exist, then the use of

[47] Rudolf Carnap, *Meaning and Necessity: A Study in Semantics and Modal Logic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 206–217.

[48] See David J. Chalmers, "Ontological Anti-Realism," in *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology*, ed. David Chalmers, David Manley, and Ryan Wasserman (Oxford: Clarendon, 2009), 77–129. Chalmers' terminology is misleading, since anti-realism on the level of ontology involves the denial of the existence of mathematical objects. It is only on the metaontological level that anti-realism is the denial that the ontological question has an objective answer. So it would be less misleading to call ontological pluralism "metaontological anti-realism" rather than "ontological anti-realism."

[49] See Mark Balaguer, *Platonism and Anti-Platonism in Mathematics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 151–179; Penelope Maddy, *Defending the Axioms: On the Philosophical Foundations of Set Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 98. Maddy offers various characterizations of arealism.

mathematical terminology is devoid of ontological significance. Internal questions about the existence of certain sets or numbers may be answered affirmatively; but there just is no answer to the external question of the existence of such entities. In that case one cannot truthfully assert that there are objects which God did not create.

Alas, however, there is no succor for the theist here. For given God's metaphysical necessity and essential aseity, there just is no possible world in which uncreated mathematical objects exist. Hence, there most certainly is a fact of the matter whether uncreated, abstract objects exist: they do not and cannot exist. Therefore, arealism is necessarily false, as is conventionalism about existence statements concerning mathematical and other abstract objects.[50]

4.4.2.1.3 Anti-Realist Responses

4.4.2.1.3.1 Fictionalism We turn now to what is perhaps the boldest option in response to Premise (II): fictionalism. Fictionalists flatly deny that mathematical sentences are true, period. Statements involving quantification over or reference to abstract objects are false (or at least untrue). Abstract objects are merely useful fictions; that is to say, even though no such objects exist, it is useful to talk as though they did. Hence, the name fictionalism.

The most evident objection to fictionalism is that some mathematical statements, like "$2 + 2 = 4$," are just obviously true. Indeed, they seem to be necessarily true. But Hartry Field reacts to the claim that a mathematical assertion like "$2 + 2 = 4$" must be true simply as a consequence of the meaning of its terms by saying that this claim cannot be right because analytic truths cannot have existential implications.[51] Field rightly contends that we cannot infer the existence of things from merely definitional truths, an insight gained from discussions of the ontological argument. But it is only his unquestioned presupposition of the proffered criterion of

[50] This negative verdict on an arealist solution does not, however, imply that Carnap's analysis is without merit. For despite the widespread rejection of conventionalism, Carnap's distinction between external and internal questions continually re-surfaces in contemporary discussions and strikes many philosophers as intuitive and helpful. By distinguishing between internal and external questions, the anti-realist circumscribes the criterion of ontological commitment. Quantification and use of singular terms in the language in which internal questions are posed is not ontologically committing for the person speaking outside the framework. Statements in the external language which are analogues of internal statements may avoid quantification over or reference to abstract objects (*ultima facie* strategies) or may be taken to be simply false (fictionalism) or to be neutral in their ontological commitments (neutralism). All of these anti-realisms are, of course, a matter of debate; but what is clear is that the debate has moved far beyond the flat imposition of the proffered criterion of ontological commitment.

[51] Hartry Field, *Science without Numbers: A Defence of Nominalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 5.

ontological commitment that leads Field to think that a statement like "2 + 2 = 4" has existential implications. Deny that criterion and one is not forced to into the awkward position of denying that 2 + 2 = 4.

In short, one's attitude toward the objection from the obviousness of elementary arithmetic is probably going to depend on one's attitude toward the proffered criterion of ontological commitment. If with the fictionalist we are convinced that quantification and singular terms are devices of ontological commitment, then we shall find upon reflection that the sentences of elementary mathematics, if taken literally, are anything but obvious. For we shall come to see that statements which we have unhesitatingly accepted as true since childhood are, in fact, radical ontological assertions about the existence of mind-independent abstract objects. As such, they are not at all obviously true. We come to realize that we have, in fact, misunderstood them all these years; we literally did not understand what we were asserting.

On the other hand, if we find sentences of elementary arithmetic to be obvious because we do not take them to be ontologically committing, then we shall be led to reject the proffered criterion of ontological commitment which would saddle us with such commitments. This seems to me the obvious course to take. Indeed, the anti-Platonist has a quick and easy argument to that end:

1. If the proffered criterion of ontological commitment is correct, then $2+2 \neq 4$.
2. $2 + 2 = 4$.
3. Therefore, proffered criterion of ontological commitment is not correct.

After all, the sentences of elementary mathematics are much more obviously true than any criterion of ontological commitment and so should be more tenaciously held and less quickly surrendered than the proffered criterion of ontological commitment.

4.4.2.1.3.2 *Ultima facie* Strategies *Ultima facie* interpretive strategies are a diverse group of anti-realist responses to indispensability arguments united by the conviction that true mathematical sentences are capable of being reformulated or interpreted without prejudice to their truth in such a way as to avoid any ontological commitments to abstract objects. Proponents of the Indispensability Argument themselves do not take us to be committed ontologically to all the things referred to or quantified over in ordinary language. For example, if I say, "There are deep differences between Republicans and Democrats," I do not mean to commit myself

to the existence of objects called *differences* (some of which are deep), despite my use of the informal quantifier "there is." In a case like this, I can reformulate my original claim so as to serve the same purpose without such ontological commitments on my part, e.g., "Republicans differ deeply from Democrats." Proponents of the Indispensability Argument demand such paraphrases of mathematical sentences from anti-realists, confident that they cannot be provided.

In fact, however, there are a number of strategies for reformulating or interpreting mathematical sentences which preserve their truth without ontological commitment to mathematical objects. The strategies of Geoffrey Hellman's modal structuralism, Charles Chihara's constructibilism, and Stephen Yablo's figuralism come to mind.[52] It is noteworthy that the mathematical adequacy of the paraphrases of mathematical sentences offered by *ultima facie* strategists has gone largely unchallenged.

So what complaint is there, from the Platonist's perspective, with various *ultima facie* strategies? The most common complaint in the literature is that such strategies either grossly misrepresent mathematical discourse or advocate without sufficient justification a radical revision of mathematical discourse.[53] The implication of this objection for *ultima facie* strategies is that the proffered reinterpretations should be rejected in favor of the *prima facie* interpretation, which is taken to be the default interpretation.

None of the prominent *ultima facie* strategists, however, advocates a revision of mathematical discourse. On the contrary, they see no reason that mathematicians should not continue in the use of their Platonistic language. Rather they are offering merely an undercutting defeater of Premise (II) of the Indispensability Argument that mathematical sentences cannot be reformulated or interpreted so as to be truth-preserving but without ontological commitment to abstract objects. Neither are Hellman and Chihara offering a hermeneutical claim about how practitioners understand mathematical discourse, since they say they

[52] See, for example, Geoffrey Hellman, *Mathematics without Numbers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); Geoffrey Hellman, "On Nominalism," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62, no. 3 (2001): 691–705; Charles S. Chihara, *Ontology and the Vicious Circle Principle* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973); Charles S. Chihara, *The Worlds of Possibility: Modal Realism and the Semantics of Modal Logic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Charles S. Chihara, *A Structural Account of Mathematics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004); Stephen Yablo, "A Paradox of Existence," in *Empty Names, Fiction, and the Puzzles of Non-existence,* ed. Anthony Everett and Thomas Hofweber (Stanford: Center for the Study of Language and Information, 2000), 275–312; Stephen Yablo, "Does Ontology Rest on a Mistake?," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 72 (1998): 229–261; Stephen Yablo, "The Myth of the Seven," in *Fictionalism in Metaphysics,* ed. Mark Eli Kalderon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 88–115.

[53] See, for example, John P. Burgess and Gideon Rosen, *A Subject with No Object* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 6–7, 205–237; John P. Burgess and Gideon Rosen, "Nominalism Reconsidered," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mathematics and Logic*, ed. Stewart Shapiro (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 515–528.

have no idea what the majority of mathematicians and scientists think about these questions. While Yablo does espouse figuralism as a hermeneutical thesis, there is no reason that the anti-realist has to present it as such. Like Chihara and Hellman, he can remain agnostic, in the absence of linguistic and sociological studies, about hermeneutical questions and present the figurative interpretation as one reasonable way of understanding abstract object talk without commitment to abstract objects. If such an interpretation is reasonable, then the Indispensability Argument has been defeated.

4.4.2.1.3.3 Pretense Theory Pretense theory takes no position with respect to the truth value of discourse involving quantification over or reference to abstract objects. The pretense theorist's essential point, rather, is that whether or not such sentences are true, we are invited to *imagine* that they are true. Abstract discourse is fictional and therefore does not commit us to the reality of abstract objects.

Contemporary theories of fiction draw much of their inspiration from the brilliant, pioneering work of Kendall Walton.[54] Prescribed imagining lies at the heart of Walton's theory of fiction. Fictional propositions are propositions which in certain contexts we are to imagine to be true.[55] Walton emphasizes that truth and fictionality are not mutually exclusive. Some of the propositions prescribed to be imagined (by a historical fiction like *War and Peace*, for example) may be true. Even if all the sentences in a novel about the future like George Orwell's *1984* turned out to be true, that novel still remains fiction.[56] What is essential to fictionality is not falsehood but a prescription to be imagined.

Mary Leng is an anti-realist philosopher of mathematics who embraces Walton's theory of fiction in order to deal with the alleged commitments of our best scientific theories to mathematical objects.[57] Leng regards the mathematical objects appearing in our scientific theories as merely useful fictions. In support of the plausibility of her view, Leng provides two non-mathematical examples of the use of fictions in scientific theorizing: idealizations (like ideal gases) and theoretical entities (like certain fundamental particles). These two cases illustrate the point that even in our best scientific theories a reason to speak *as if* an object existed is not always a

[54] Kendall L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).
[55] Walton, 39. "Fictional propositions are propositions that are *to be* imagined – whether or not they are in fact imagined."
[56] Walton, 74.
[57] Mary Leng, *Mathematics and Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 9–10.

reason to believe that that object exists. Leng thinks that nothing in our current, best scientific worldview gives us good reason to believe in mathematical objects as anything more than useful fictions. Hence, we have no reason to think that such objects exist.

An important objection to pretense theory is that mathematics is not of the genre of fiction. Mathematicians and scientists take mathematics to be a body of knowledge and a realm of discovery, not invention. To regard mathematical statements as fictional is alleged to distort the nature of this discipline. In weighing this objection, we need to keep in mind that the pretense theorist is not defending a hermeneutical claim about how professional mathematicians or scientists in fact understand mathematical sentences. In order to undercut the Indispensability Argument for Platonism, the pretense theorist need show only that mathematical sentences *can* be reasonably taken to be fictional.

In fact, there are some features of mathematical discourse that make it seem a prime candidate for a fictional interpretation. For example, axiomatization of mathematical theories naturally invites a pretense theoretical interpretation. Take the Axiom of Infinity in standard Zermelo–Fraenkel set theory:

> Axiom of Infinity: There exists a set x having the empty set $\varnothing$ as a member, and for any member y of x the union of y and $\{y\}$ is also a member of x.

It is striking that this is the only axiom of standard set theory with existential implications. On a pretense theoretical approach, the Axiom of Infinity is something we are prescribed to imagine true. We are to make believe that there is an infinity of these things called sets and then are free to explore the fictional world of our imagination. This will certainly be a journey of discovery, which will issue in a great deal of knowledge of the mathematical world determined by the axioms.

Such an attitude toward the axioms of set theory is not uncommon among mathematicians and philosophers of mathematics. For example, postulationalism, which treats the axioms of competing set theories as postulates whose consequences may be explored, invites us, in effect, to make believe that the axioms are true without committing ourselves to their objective truth.[58] In fact, the philosopher of mathematics Stewart Shapiro observes, "The strongest versions of working realism are no more than claims that mathematics can (or should) be practiced *as if* the subject matter were a realm of

[58] See Michael Potter, *Set Theory and Its Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 6–11.

independently existing, abstract, eternal entities."[59] This characterization would make working realists into pretense theorists!

But is it plausible to take the Axiom of Infinity as something prescribed to be imagined rather than as a straightforward metaphysical assertion? I think the answer is obviously affirmative. It is universally admitted that the Axiom of Infinity is not intuitively obvious. Its lack of intuitive warrant was one of the heavy stones that helped to sink logicism, an early twentieth century attempt to derive set theory from logic alone. Since the axiom lacks intuitive warrant, the Axiom of Infinity is adopted by contemporary mathematicians for reasons that are variously called "pragmatic" or "regressive" or "extrinsic," reasons which do not justify its truth, but its mathematical utility. Moreover, as Potter points out, there are multiple versions of the Axiom of Infinity which postulate different sets. A defense of the axiom on pragmatic grounds "does not directly give us a ground for preferring one sort of axiom of infinity over another," he says, since any of them will work.[60] As a result, says Potter, Platonists "have frustratingly little they can say" by way of justification for their preferred version of the axiom.[61] As a serious assertion of ontology, the Axiom of Infinity is a breathtaking claim that utterly outstrips our intuitions.

So much more can be said on this head, but axiomatic set theory seems to be a perfect candidate for a pretense theoretical approach. This conclusion has sweeping significance because set theory is typically regarded as foundational for the rest of mathematics, since the whole of mathematics can be reductively analyzed in terms of pure sets. In the words of philosopher of mathematics Penelope Maddy, "our much-valued mathematical knowledge rests on two supports: inexorable deductive logic, the stuff of proof, and the set theoretic axioms."[62] If the latter involve no ontological commitments, neither does the whole of mathematics.

4.4.2.2 Responses to Premise (I)

The foregoing strategies all accept or, at least, do not challenge, the criterion of ontological commitment that lies at the heart of the Indispensability Argument. More fundamental challenges to the Indispensability

[59] Stewart Shapiro, *Philosophy of Mathematics: Structure and Ontology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 7.
[60] Potter, *Set Theory*, 70.
[61] Potter, 72.
[62] Penelope Maddy, *Naturalism in Mathematics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 1; see further chapter 2, "Set Theory as a Foundation."

Argument call into question that criterion and, hence, Premise (I). Some of these versions of anti-Platonism ask why true sentences may not contain irreferential singular terms or why successful reference must involve the existence of an object in the world. Others challenge the criterion by demanding why use of the existential quantifier should be interpreted to assert the existence of a real world object which is the value of the variable bound by the quantifier.

4.4.2.2.1 Free Logic

Free Logics are logics which are free of existential import with respect to singular terms but whose quantifiers are taken to be devices of ontological commitment. Free logic will avoid the unwanted commitments which the proffered criterion would engender by scrapping classical logic's inference rules of Existential Generalization (EG) and Universal Instantiation (UI). So, for example, from the truth of "Sherlock Holmes is the most famous detective of English fiction" we cannot infer that $\exists x\,(x =$ the most famous detective of English fiction). By the same token, from the arithmetic truth that $3 < 5$ we cannot infer that $\exists x\,(x < 5)$.

A view that asks us to abandon EG and UI would seem to require very powerful motivations. It is perhaps surprising how powerfully motivated some of the claims of free logic are. Karel Lambert, a pioneer of free logic, complains that although modern logic in the late nineteenth century shed itself of various existence assumptions implicit in Aristotelian logic with respect to the use of general terms,[63] modern logic remains infected with existence assumptions with respect to the use of singular terms, assumptions that ought not to characterize a purely formal discipline.[64] For we have at the deepest level "a primordial intuition that logic is a tool of the philosopher and ideally should be neutral with respect to philosophical truth. . . . So if there are preconditions to logic that have the effect of settling

[63] These include the assumptions that in the traditional "square of opposition" A-statements like "All men are mortal" imply I-statements like "Some man is mortal," and E-statements like "No men are immortal" imply O-statements like "Some man is not immortal." Modern sentential logic strips Aristotelian logic of these existence assumptions by interpreting universally quantified statements to have the logical form of conditionals, e.g., "If something is a man, then it is mortal," which carries no commitment to the existence of a man. Just as modern sentential logic aspires to be free of existence assumptions with respect to general terms, so free logic aspires to go one step further to be free of existence assumptions when it comes to singular terms.

[64] Karel Lambert, "Existential Import Revisited," *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic* 4, no. 4 (1963): 288–292; Karel Lambert, "The Nature of Free Logic," in *Philosophical Applications of Free Logic,* ed. Karel Lambert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3–12; Karel Lambert, *Free Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 17–24.

what exists and what does not exist, they ought to be eliminated because they corrupt the ideal of logic as a philosophical tool."[65]

These existence assumptions regarding singular terms surface dramatically in the way in which standard modern logic handles identity statements. For such statements cannot be true, according to standard logic, unless the referents of the singular terms employed in such statements exist. In other words, identity statements are ontologically committing for him who asserts them. But it seems bizarre to think that from a seemingly tautologous truth of the form $t = t$, where t is some singular term, it follows that the thing denoted by t actually exists. Nevertheless, this is what standard logic requires. Lambert takes this ontological implication of mere identity statements to be absurd. For it would follow from the fact that "Vulcan = Vulcan" that there is some object identical with Vulcan, that is to say, that Vulcan exists! Standard logic avoids this untoward result by restricting the terms in true identity statements to those designating existing objects. For example, standard logic must regard a statement like "Vulcan = Vulcan" as false, even though it appears to be a tautology that is necessarily true. Standard logic cannot therefore distinguish the truth value of identity statements like "Zeus = Zeus" and "Zeus = Allah." Yet the first seems necessarily true and the second obviously false. Nor can standard logic affirm the truth of "Aristotle = Aristotle," since Aristotle no longer exists and so there is no thing with which he can be identified. It would be the height of ontological presumption, I think, to claim that the truth of such a statement implies a tenseless theory of time, according to which all moments and things in time are equally existent. Such an inference would only underscore the free logician's claim that modern logic is still infected with inappropriate existence assumptions.

As a result of limiting truths of identity to those whose singular terms denote existing objects, standard logic becomes limited in its application to certain inferences and does not permit us to discriminate between inferences where the referentiality of the terms is crucial and those where it is not. For example, we are prohibited from inferring, "Lincoln was the Great Emancipator; Lincoln brooded; therefore, the Great Emancipator brooded," an inference whose obvious validity should not be dependent on Lincoln's existing.

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[65] Karel Lambert, *Meinong and the Principle of Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 98–99. For example, should not the methods of logic apply to reasoning involving terms which, for all we know, may or may not refer to existing objects, as in the case of astronomers who used "Vulcan" before knowing whether such a planet existed or not? John Nolt observes that the obligation to confirm the existence of things before naming them is so irksome that "even mathematicians routinely flout it. . . . They get away with this, usually, only by being discreetly inexplicit about the underlying logic – which is, in consequence, not rigorously classical" (John Nolt, "Free Logics," in Dale Jacquette, ed., *Handbook of the Philosophy of Science*: vol. 5: *Philosophy of Logic* [Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2006], 1023).

Proponents of free logic therefore propose to rid logic of all existence assumptions with respect to both general and singular terms. Free logic has thus become almost synonymous with the logic of irreferential (or non-denoting, vacuous, empty) singular terms. Thus, unlike neo-Meinongianism (to be discussed below) free logic need not presuppose that the referents of such terms are non-existent objects; rather, there just are no referents. Advocates of so-called positive (as opposed to negative or neutral) free logic maintain that certain sentences can be truly asserted even though they contain irreferential singular terms.

This feature of positive free logic strikes me as well-motivated and eminently plausible. The truth of identity statements involving vacuous singular terms is of a piece with the assumed truth of many sentences which feature vacuous singular terms. Michael Dummett cites as an illustration the following paragraph from a London daily:

> Margaret Thatcher yesterday gave her starkest warning yet about the dangers of global warming caused by air pollution. But she did not announce any new policy to combat climate change and sea level rises, apart from a qualified commitment that Britain would stabilize its emissions of carbon dioxide – the most important 'greenhouse' gas altering the climate – by the year 2005. Britain would only fulfill that commitment if other, unspecified nations promised similar restraint.[66]

Dummett then observes, "Save for 'Margaret Thatcher,' 'air' and 'sea,' there is not a noun or noun phrase in this paragraph incontrovertibly standing for or applying to a concrete object (is a nation a concrete object, or a gas?)."[67] Obviously not; but then is a nation or a gas an abstract object? No. Taking the singular terms of this paragraph to be ontologically committing would commit its user to such strange entities as commitments, dangers, and the climate. If we are not ingenious enough to find acceptable paraphrases for such sentences, are we really committed to such bizarre entities, on pain of the falsehood of our discourse?

Free logic's denial that use of singular terms in sentences we take to be true is ontologically committing for their user is, I think, quite plausible and constitutes a step in the right direction. But because free logic takes the existential quantifier of first-order logic to carry existence commitments, it cannot avoid the Platonistic commitments of much mathematical talk. Instead, one will have to have recourse to some other anti-realism like

[66] Michael Dummett, *Frege: Philosophy of Mathematics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 231.
[67] Dummett, *Frege,* 231.

fictionalism in order to avoid such unwelcome commitments – unless, that is, one interprets logical quantifiers to also be ontologically neutral. Such a neutral logic will not, technically speaking, be a free logic, but as Alex Orenstein remarks, such terminology may be misleading, for "Isn't a logic which disassociates the quantifiers from existence a paradigm of a logic that is free of existence assumptions, indeed freer of existence assumptions than Lambert's variety?"[68] The viability of these solutions will occupy us below.

4.4.2.2.2 Neo-Meinongianism

Are there things that do not exist? Notoriously, the Austrian philosopher Alexius Meinong thought so, and there has been among contemporary analytic philosophers in recent decades a remarkable resurgence of Meinongian thinking with respect to non-existent objects. Since neo-Meinongians typically include abstract objects among the things that do not exist, neo-Meinongianism is a congenial option for the anti-Platonist. With respect to the customary devices of ontological commitment, neo-Meinongianism holds that successful reference does, indeed, involve a relation to an object of some sort but denies that quantification over various objects is ontologically committing.

With respect to singular terms, Richard Routley, the dean of contemporary neo-Meinongians, inveighs against what he calls "the Reference Theory" as "the fundamental philosophical error" of the customary semantics.[69] That theory states,

RT. All (primary) truth-valued discourse is referential,

where "referential" is understood to mean that the subject terms of that discourse have as their referents existing objects.[70] Nevertheless, Routley accepts wholeheartedly the assumption of (RT) that successful reference is a relation in which words stand to certain objects and even goes beyond (RT) in holding that no singular terms fail to stand in such a relation. What he denies is that all of the objects which are the referents of singular terms are existing objects; some, rather, are non-existing objects. For Meinong

[68] Alex Orenstein, "Is Existence What Existential Quantification Expresses?," in *Perspectives on Quine*, ed. Robert B. Barrett and Roger F. Gibson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 265.
[69] Richard Routley [Sylvan], *Exploring Meinong's Jungle and Beyond: An Investigation of Noneism and the Theory of Items* (Canberra: Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, 1979), i.
[70] Routley, *Exploring Meinong's Jungle*, 52. By "primary" Routley means to exclude, I presume, complex sentences involving intensional contexts, such as "Johnny fears the bogeyman," which are not taken to require referents for singular terms within such contexts in order to be true. By "truth-valued" Routley must mean "true," since on the customary semantics a sentence containing a vacuous singular term can have the truth value "false."

and his followers, singular terms in true sentences do refer to objects – they are not irreferential – but the objects they refer to may be non-existent.

On the other hand, neo-Meinongianism holds that quantification over various objects is not ontologically committing. Like free logicians, Routley contends that the central truths of logic should be prior to and independent of claims of particular metaphysical theories. But while Routley applauds free logic's denial that use of singular terms commits us to existing objects as the referents of those terms, he faults free logic for retaining the existentially loaded quantifiers of classical logic. Because free logic permits quantification over only what exists, it proves to be "an unsatisfactory halfway house" on the road to an adequate theory, which is a truly neutral quantification logic.[71] One may retain entirely the formalism of classical logic, including UI and EG, by removing any ontological commitments in pure logic. To signal the difference in interpretation, Routley substitutes the particular quantifier "P," to be read "for some. . .," for the existential quantifier "∃," and the universal quantifier "U" for the traditional "∀". By adding an existence predicate "*E!*" we can symbolize "Some things do not exist" as (P*x*) (¬*E!x*). Routley thus arrives at a neutral logic, whose virtues he unfolds at length.[72]

Meinong himself held enigmatically that mathematical objects have *being* even though they do not *exist*. Neo-Meinongians reject the distinction between being and existence and so regard abstract objects as belonging to the realm of objects which do not have being, since they do not exist. Classical mathematics can be retained without reservation once a neutral quantificational logic is in place. Accordingly, neo-Meinongians think that there are objects, including mathematical objects, that do not exist and, moreover, that we frequently refer to such objects in literally true sentences. The neo-Meinongian, then, would undercut the Indispensability Argument for Platonism by rejecting the customary criterion of ontological commitment. Quantificational logic is taken to be neutral with respect to ontological commitment, and even though abstract singular terms are referential, their referents do not exist. Therefore mathematical discourse can be true without committing its user ontologically to existent objects.

What might be said by way of assessment of neo-Meinongianism? Consider first its treatment of singular terms. As we have seen, Routley assumes reference to be a relation between words and objects rather than an activity of persons. So what Routley objects to in (RT) is that the objects which stand in relation to certain words must be existing objects. It seems to me, therefore, that Routley's critique of (RT) is not as radical

[71] Routley, 79.
[72] Routley, chap. 1, pt. 4, §§15–21.

(in the sense of getting to the root of the matter) as it ought to be. J. N. Findlay indicts Meinong's Theory of Objects primarily on these grounds. He writes,

> Meinong assumes throughout his treatment that an object is in some sense a logical *prius* of a conscious reference or intention: for there to be a conscious reference or intention there must in some wide sense *be* something which that reference or intention is 'of'. . . . Since this is obviously not true in an ordinary sense in the case of *some* conscious intentions, there must, Meinong thinks, be a subtle sense or senses in which there *are* objects of such conscious intentions. . . . What should be seen is that this whole line of argumentation is wrong: . . . what our usage shows is that 'thinking' and its cognates are not relational expressions like 'above', 'before', 'killing', 'meeting', &c., nor can they be said to express relations. . . . We cannot therefore validly take an object of thought out of its object-position in a statement and make it an independent subject of reference: from '*X* thinks of a *Y* as being *Z*' it does not follow that there is a *Y* which is being thought of by *X*, nor even that a thought-of *Y* really is *Z*. . . .
>
> That intentionality is not a relation but 'relation-like' (*relativliches*) is, of course, an insight of Brentano's: Meinong, who frequently surpassed his master, in this respect certainly lagged behind him. He could only conceive intentional references in terms of objects logically prior to them, on which they necessarily depended: hence, the many absurdities of his theory of objects.[73]

Meinong's Theory of Objects should be accompanied by a more radical critique of (RT), so as to call into question the assumption that reference is a word-object relation. Routley does not, to my knowledge, directly engage the Brentano-Husserl-inspired construal of reference as an intentional property of agents, nor have I encountered such an engagement in other neo-Meinongian thinkers.[74] Launching such a fundamental critique of (RT) would, however, be to abandon neo-Meinongianism for neutralism, the next and final option we shall consider.

With respect to existential quantification, it seems to me that neo-Meinongians have argued persuasively that a neutral quantificational logic is preferable to a logic with existentially loaded quantifiers. As I have argued elsewhere, the use of existentially loaded quantifiers results in an inadequate treatment of important philosophical issues with respect

[73] J. N. Findlay, *Meinong's Theory of Objects and Values*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 343–344.
[74] But see the very nice discussion of Brentano's views on intentional objects in Kenneth J. Perszyk, *Nonexistent Objects: Meinong and Contemporary Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993), 198–202.

to intentionality, temporal becoming, modal discourse, and mereology.[75] These considerations certainly suffice to show at least that the existentially loaded interpretation of the existential quantifier is far from incumbent upon us and that therefore we may plausibly reject it. Alex Orenstein wisely reminds us that "There are fashions in philosophical explications," one of which is today taking metaphysically heavy existence assertions to be expressed by the first-order existential quantifier.[76] It is perfectly reasonable to buck the fashion trend in this regard. So doing opens the door for affirming truths like "There is a prime number between 2 and 4" without commitment to the existence of mathematical objects.

4.4.2.2.3 Neutralism

Neutralism, like free logic and neo-Meinongianism, rejects certain key assumptions about ontological commitment which constitute the common ground shared by fictionalism, *ultima facie* strategies, and pretense theory with Platonism. The neutralist holds that *neither* existential quantification *nor* the use of singular terms is a device of ontological commitment. He is therefore unfazed by the Platonist's conviction that various statements quantifying over or featuring singular terms referring to mathematical objects are, without qualification, true.[77]

In our discussion of neo-Meinongianism and free logic we have already alluded to the disadvantages of taking first-order quantifiers and singular terms to be devices of ontological commitment. Here we ask, what reasons might given for adopting the Platonist's proffered criterion of ontological commitment?

Consider first existential quantification. Jody Azzouni challenges Quine's assumption that the existential quantifier of first-order logic does or should carry the burden of expressing ontological commitment. Quine thought

[75] Craig, *God and Abstract Objects*, chap. 11; Craig, *God Over All*, chaps. 6–7.

[76] Orenstein, "Is Existence?," 266. Orenstein follows neutralists in introducing an existence predicate instead in order to express existential claims.

[77] The failure to realize this fact is a central failing of van Inwagen's Indispensability Argument featured in his "Response" in our *Do Numbers Exist?* The burden of his Response is to show that the applicability of mathematics to the world is inexplicable apart from mathematical truth. Such a claim is, however, neutral with respect to the debate between Platonism and anti-Platonism, for conceptualists, free logicians, neo-Meinongians, *ultima facie* strategists, and neutralists all affirm mathematical truth. His argument has purchase only against views that reject mathematical truth. For that reason van Inwagen greatly misleads his reader when he states that in his Response he will argue for the thesis "that if numbers and other mathematical objects do not exist, then the applicability of mathematics to the world about us (which cannot be disputed) is a mystery." For what van Inwagen actually argues for is the thesis that if numerical and other mathematical sentences are not true, then the applicability of mathematics is a mystery. His is an argument for mathematical truth, not mathematical objects. It is only in conjunction with his criterion of ontological commitment that mathematical truth implies the reality of mathematical objects. As a neutralist who believes in mathematical truth, I am unfazed by his response.

it obvious that the existential quantifier of first-order logic is ontologically committing.[78] Azzouni takes Quine's argument for the triviality of the criterion to be that in ordinary language "there is" carries ontological commitment and that this idiom is straightforwardly regimented as the existential quantifier in first-order logic. The existential quantifier naturally reproduces the ontological commitments carried by "there is/are" in the vernacular.

The problem for the Quinean is that in ordinary language informal quantificational phrases do *not* seem to be ontologically committing. Consider Thomas Hofweber's list of some of the things we ordinarily say there are:

- something that we have in common
- infinitely many primes
- something that we both believe
- the common illusion that one is smarter than one's average colleague
- a way you smile
- a lack of compassion in the world
- the way the world is
- several ways the world might have been
- a faster way to get to Berkeley from Stanford than going through San Jose
- the hope that this dissertation will shed some light on ontology
- the chance that it might not
- a reason why it might not.[79]

It would be fantastic to think that there are real objects answering to these descriptions. There is no evidence that the ordinary language speaker labors under the delusion that there are.

Neo-Quineans may simply prescribe taking "there is/are" and "exists" in such a way as to indicate ontological commitments. When we do, then we must correct the ordinary language speaker by either denying the truth of his assertion or offering a paraphrase that avoids the unwanted commitments. Azzouni takes a very dim view of this sort of move on the part of the neo-Quinean, characterizing it as a kind of philosophical chicanery:

> The literal onticist may also claim one *can* compel the ordinary person into *trying* to paraphrase. 'There are fictional mice that talk,' one says, during a discussion about talking fictional animals. 'Oh, so you believe

[78] Quine claimed that his criterion was "scarcely contestable" because "($\exists x$)" is explained by the words "there is an object x such that" (W. V. O. Quine, *Philosophy of Logic,* 2nd ed. [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986], 89).

[79] Thomas Hofweber, "Ontology and Objectivity" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1999), 1–2. See also Gerald Vision, "Reference and the Ghost of Parmenides," in *Non-existence and Predication*, ed. Rudolf Haller, Grazer Philosophische Studien 25–26 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1986), 297–326.

> fictional mice *really exist*?' the philosophical trickster responds. 'I didn't say that,' one responds. 'Yes, you sure did – you said "*there are* fictional mice that talk". What do you think "there is" means?' *One* may now try to paraphrase. But what's happened is that the philosophical trickster has (implicitly) switched on *usage* – now one is speaking so that 'there is' (at least for the time being) *does* convey onticity; and the ordinary person isn't sophisticated enough to see how he or she has been duped.[80]

The trick is co-opting the evident truth of the ordinary language expression in order to imply the truth of a metaphysically heavyweight assertion. This is illegitimately borrowed capital. As we saw in our discussion of fictionalism, when the alleged ontological commitments of a statement are made plain by the neo-Quinean, then it is often not at all obvious that the statement so interpreted is true and its denial false.

Theodore Sider is more candid than the trickster: "Ontological realism should not claim that ordinary quantifiers carve at the joints, or that disputes using ordinary quantifiers are substantive. All that's important is that one can introduce a fundamental quantifier, which can then be used to pose substantive ontological questions."[81] When one does so, one is no longer speaking ordinary English, but "a new language – 'Ontologese' – whose quantifiers are *stipulated* to carve at the joints."[82] If one stipulates that "there is/are" is being used to indicate ontological commitments, then,

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[80] Jody Azzouni, "Ontological Commitment in the Vernacular," *Noûs* 41, no. 2 (2007): 224n38. He complains,

> "There has been a certain amount of unfortunate condescension towards the ordinary person (and, it should be pointed out, scientists, however sophisticated, are officially among the Quinean laity): a tendency for philosophers to claim that the ordinary person doesn't even know what it *means* to be ontically committed; that is, the discourse uttered by such persons is taken to routinely betray ontic commitments that person would disavow (were they brought to attention). It's a tribute to the rigors of philosophical education that such a view does not appear (to philosophers) implausible *on the face of it*" (220).

The stipulationist puts the ordinary person in an awkward situation only by changing the way in which informal quantifiers are used.

[81] Theodore Sider, *Writing the Book of the World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), 171.

[82] Sider, *Writing the Book*, 172. Sider says that even if the neutralist "is right about natural language quantifiers, ontologists could always relocate to the metaphysics room, and conduct their dispute in Ontologese" (197). See also Peter van Inwagen, "Introduction: Inside and Outside the Ontology Room," in *Existence: Essays in Ontology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1–14. Van Inwagen uses the metaphor of "being in the ontology room" for speaking Ontologese, or what he calls "Tarskian." Van Inwagen thinks that the sentence "Chairs exist" expresses a different proposition in Tarskian than it does in ordinary language and is therefore false in Tarskian though true in ordinary English. Similarly, I think, if the neutralist were willing to concede that disputants are speaking two different languages, he might say that the proposition expressed by "Numbers exist" in English is true while the proposition expressed by that sentence in Ontologese or Tarskian is false. Van Inwagen actually *agrees* with the neutralist that the proposition asserted outside the ontology room "*is* metaphysically neutral." If the neo-Quinean demands to know what proposition is expressed by "Numbers exist" in English, the neutralist can say with van Inwagen ("Ontology Room," 15–16) that he has no better way of expressing it than that sentence taken in a lightweight sense. He can illustrate the difference by appealing to examples where paraphrases are available, for example, the sentence "The number of Martian moons is two" expresses the same proposition in English as "Mars has two moons," which is not ontologically committing to the number two, since it involves no numerical singular term. But there is no reason to expect that ordinary English should have the resources to paraphrase away all quantification over or reference to things, given the lightweight sense of "exist" in ordinary language.

of course, the neutralist who is an anti-realist will regard a statement like "There are odd numbers" as false, and the neutralist who is a Platonist will regard the statement as true. But neutralism has not thereby been defeated or shown to be irrelevant, for it is a claim about how we *do* commit ourselves ontologically in ordinary English, not in a foreign language like Ontologese. Do we, in fact, commit ourselves ontologically through formal and informal quantifiers, as Quineans have asserted? The answer is plausibly, no.

In fact, the neutralist should protest the suggestion that there even *is* such a language as Ontologese which is spoken in the metaphysics seminar. All there really is is ordinary language, and we can employ various linguistic and rhetorical devices to make it clear when we are speaking in a metaphysically heavy sense. But nobody – not metaphysicians, not ontologists – actually speaks the language of Ontologese, for there just is no such language. Metaphysical discussions would quickly grind to a halt if every participant had to be able to furnish on demand paraphrases of ordinary language sentences involving unwanted ontological commitments when construed as sentences of Ontologese.

Of course, one may simply stipulate that formal and informal quantifiers are to be taken in a metaphysically heavyweight sense. But stipulationists trivialize the debate by simply requiring, in effect, that we must choose between realism and anti-realism about various purported objects. We already knew that.[83] What they cannot do is use the obvious truth of ordinary language locutions involving quantificational phrases as justification for accepting the truth of sentences in Ontologese stipulated to carry ontological commitments.[84] The point remains that without a refutation

[83] Unless, that is, we are arealists like Balaguer and Maddy.

[84] In our exchange in *Do Numbers Exist?* it becomes clear that van Inwagen and the neutralist fully agree that sentences of ordinary English involving quantificational expressions or singular terms are susceptible of both a lightweight and a heavyweight reading and, moreover, that a sentence may be true when taken in a lightweight sense but false when taken in a heavyweight sense. Thus, for example, the sentence "The crack in the Liberty Bell is 62.23 cm in length" is true when taken in a lightweight sense but false when taken in a heavyweight sense. For the expression "the crack in the Liberty Bell" does not, by van Inwagen's lights, denote an existent object. Now the neutralist says the same thing about the sentences of applied mathematics. Van Inwagen objects to neutralism on the ground that the neutralist postulates that quantificational expressions "have both a 'heavyweight' or 'existentially loaded' sense and a 'lightweight' or 'ontologically neutral' sense" (Van Inwagen and Craig, *Do Numbers Exist?*, 62). But that describes quantifier variance, not neutralism, which denies that the quantifier as such has two meanings. So the neutralist and van Inwagen both seem to agree that the informal quantifiers of ordinary language are in themselves ontologically neutral and can be used to make both metaphysically lightweight and heavyweight assertions. Ironically, the premises of van Inwagen's Indispensability Argument are evidently formulated in ordinary English, not Ontologese, and so if we accordingly give his premises a lightweight reading, not only the neutralist, but even the hard-nosed fictionalist may affirm their truth. For the fictionalist regards as false only sentences in which existential quantifiers and singular terms are devices of ontological commitment, i.e., sentences of Ontologese. Thus paradoxically even the fictionalist can affirm the truth of van Inwagen's premises.

of neutralism, the Indispensability Argument, which is usually based on how we actually do use formal and informal quantifiers, cannot get off the ground.

But what about neutralism's view of the use of singular terms? It seems to be a datum of ordinary language that we frequently assert true statements which contain singular terms which do not denote existent objects. Consider the following examples:

- The weather in Atlanta will be hot today.
- Sherrie's disappointment with her husband was deep and unassuageable.
- The price of the tickets is ten dollars.
- Wednesday falls between Tuesday and Thursday.
- His sincerity was touching.
- James couldn't pay his mortgage.
- The view of the Jezreel Valley from atop Mt. Carmel was breath-taking.
- Your constant complaining is futile.
- Spassky's forfeiture ended the match.
- He did it for my sake and the children's.

It would be fantastic to think that all of the singular terms featured in these plausibly true sentences have objects in the world corresponding to them. Examples like these are legion. In fact, I suspect that singular terms which refer to real world objects may actually be the *exception* rather than the rule in ordinary language.

How could it be that we are able to assert truths by means of sentences with empty singular terms? In order to get at this question, we first need to address the question, do vacuous singular terms refer? And in order to answer that question, we need to ask what it is to refer, or what is the nature of reference? This question is largely neglected by contemporary theorists. Almost all contemporary theories of reference are actually theories about how to *fix* reference rather than theories about the nature of reference itself. The unspoken assumption behind most contemporary theories of reference is the presupposition that reference is a word-world relation, so that terms which refer must have real world objects as their denotations. It therefore behooves us to look more deeply into the nature of reference.

It is an experiential datum that referring is a speech act carried out by an intentional agent.[85] Words in and of themselves engage in no such activity. Lifeless and inert, words are just ink marks on paper or sounds heard

[85] A fact emphasized by John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 27; cf. John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 228.

by a percipient. Absent an agent, shapes or noises do not refer to anything at all. If, for example, an earthquake were to send several pebbles rolling down a hillside which randomly came to rest in the configuration JOHN LOVES SUSIE, the names – if we would even call them names – would not refer to anybody. As John Searle says, "Since sentences . . . are, considered in one way, just objects in the world like any other objects, their capacity to represent is not intrinsic but is derived from the Intentionality of the mind."[86] An interpreting agent uses his words as a means of referring to something. Referring is thus an intentional activity of persons, and words are mere instruments.

It is the great merit of Arvid Båve's deflationary theory of reference that he takes truly seriously the fact, given lip service everywhere, that it is *persons* who refer to things *by means of* their words, so that words at best refer only in a derivative sense, if at all.[87] Båve's significant contribution to our understanding reference is not so much that his theory is deflationary, as helpful as that may be, but that he furnishes a central schema for reference formulated in terms of the referring activity of agents.

Båve proffers the following deflationary schema for reference:

(R) *a* refers to *b* iff *a* says something (which is) about *b,*

where "*a*" always stands for a speaker. Though formulated in terms of agents rather than words, this account is truly deflationary because it does not attempt to tell us anything about the nature of reference itself. It leaves it entirely open whether reference is a relation (as Frege and Meinong assumed) or whether it is an intentional property of a mind (as held by Brentano and Husserl).

Given (R), we now ask, what does it mean to say that *a* says something "about" *b*, as stipulated on the right hand side of the biconditional (R)? Båve proposes to "analyse the expression 'about', and then explain 'refer' in terms of it."[88] He offers the following schema as implicitly defining "about":

(A) That *S* (*t*) is about *t*,

where *S* ( ) is a sentence context with a slot for singular terms. Again, Båve's account of aboutness is extraordinarily deflationary. It does not tell

[86] John Searle, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), vii.
[87] Arvid Båve, "A Deflationary Theory of Reference," *Synthèse* 169, no. 1 (2009): 51–73. I am very grateful to Arvid Båve for extended discussion of Båve's theory.
[88] Båve, "Deflationary Theory of Reference," 63.

us what aboutness is but simply provides a schema for determining what a that-clause containing a singular term (or, presumably, terms) is about. So, for example, that Ponce de Leon sought the Fountain of Youth is about Ponce de Leon and about the Fountain of Youth because the singular terms "Ponce de Leon" and "the Fountain of Youth" fill the blanks in the sentence context "____ sought____."

Now as a deflationary schema, it is very difficult to see how (A) provides an *analysis* of aboutness or serves as an *explanation* of reference, as Båve claims. Taken as an explanation of reference, (A) seems to get things exactly backwards. The reason why That *S* (*t*) is about *t* is because "*t*" is used by some agent to refer to *t*. It is natural, then, to provide an account of aboutness that is cashed out, not in terms of linguistic expressions, but in terms of the speaker's intentions. What is wanted in place of (A) is something along the lines of

(A′) *a* says something *S* about *b* iff in saying *S* *a* intends *b*,

where "*a* intends *b*" means something like "*a* has *b* in mind." In accordance with (R) I refer to *b* because I say something about *b*, and in line with (A′) I say something about *b* because in making my utterance I intend *b*. On such an account what some theorists have called "speaker's reference" becomes paramount.[89]

By construing reference in terms of the referring activity of agents and characterizing aboutness in intentional terms, we make an advance over neo-Meinongianism to arrive at a more satisfactory neutralist account. This account is consistent with anti-realism because successful singular reference does not require that there be objects in the world which stand in some sort of relation to a speaker's words. Of course, sometimes objects answering to the designations we use may exist. But in a surprisingly large number of cases, as our earlier illustrations showed, there are no such objects. That does not stop us from talking about them or referring to them, for these activities are, at least in such cases, purely intentional activities.

The neutralist who is also an anti-realist will thus stand in the tradition of Brentano and Husserl in thinking of reference, not as a word-world relation, but as an intentional activity of agents which may or

[89] Saul Kripke, "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference," in *Contemporary Perspectives in the Philosophy of Language*, Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, Jr., and Howard K. Wettstein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), 6–27. As Searle notes, Kripke's distinction is not really about reference at all, since referring is something only speakers do, but is about the difference between the speaker's meaning and the linguistic meaning of the relevant expressions (John Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979], 155; John Searle, *Speech Acts,* chap. 4). But the linguistic meaning of the words is beside the point so far as reference is concerned.

may not have a correlative real world object.[90] Brentano insisted upon the uniqueness of mental phenomena as object-directed or intentional. The object-directedness of mental reference does not imply that intentional objects exist in the external world; "All it means is that a mentally active subject is referring to them."[91] For Husserl intentional objects are real world objects about which one is thinking; but not all intentional activity has intentional objects associated with it. Rejecting Meinongianism, Husserl held that when no object exists, then the intentional activity exists without any object.[92] I can say things about non-existents like Pegasus, the accident that was prevented, holes, or numbers without committing myself to there being objects of which I am speaking. Thus, the non-existence of mathematical objects does not preclude our talking about or referring to them.

4.5 Concluding Remarks

The Bible teaches that God is the sole ultimate reality, the Creator of everything apart from himself. This biblical doctrine of divine aseity is confirmed by various arguments of natural theology and the demands of perfect being theology. The principal objection to the biblical doctrine of divine aseity comes from contemporary Platonism, which maintains that uncreated abstract objects exist. The principal reason for thinking that such abstracta exist is epitomized in the Indispensability Argument based upon our ineluctable quantification over and reference to abstract objects in sentences we take to be true.

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[90] Recall Findlay's illustration of the relational property *to-the-east-of-China* (*supra,* 41–42). If China is really a constituent of this property, then China must inhere, in all its solid immensity, in the Philippine Islands, which is absurd (Findlay, *Meinong's Theory of Objects*, 40–41). Similarly, with respect to intentionality, if I think of *X*, my *thinking-of-X* is a monadic mental property of which *X* is not a constituent. My state of mind is adequate to *X* because it has the monadic property of *being-directed-to-X*. See also Joseph Margolis, "Reference as Relational: *Pro* and *Contra*," in Haller, *Non-existence and Predication*, 327–357; R. Scott Smith, *Naturalism and Our Knowledge of Reality: Testing Religious Truth-Claims* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2012), especially chap. 2, where he interprets Fred Dretske, Michael Tye, and William Lycan as endorsing a view of intentionality which construes it as a property, not a relation.

[91] Franz Brentano, "The Distinction between Mental and Physical Phenomena," trans. D. B. Terrell from *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunckt* (1894), vol. 1, book 2, chap. 1, rep. in *Realism and the Background of Phenomenology*, ed. Roderick M. Chisholm (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview, 1960), 50–51; Franz Brentano, "Genuine and Fictitious Objects," trans. D. B. Terrell from *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunckt*, Supplementary Essay IX (1911), rep. in *Realism and the Background of Phenomenology*, 71.

[92] See Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, trans. J. N. Findlay [New York: Humanities Press, 1970], 2: 595–596. For discussion see Dallas Willard, *Logic and the Objectivity of Knowledge* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1984), 218–225; Dallas Willard, "For Lack of Intentionality," in *Phenomenology 2005, Selected Essays from North America*, ed. Lester Embree and Thomas Nenon (Bucharest: Zeta Books, 2007), 5: 593–612.

We have seen, however, a plethora of philosophically defensible anti-Platonist alternatives to Platonism on offer today. Free logic, neo-Meinongianism, and neutralism constitute formidable challenges to the criterion of ontological commitment that comes to expression in Premise (I) of the Indispensability Argument. Coupled with the formidable challenges to Premise (II) of that argument posed by various realist and anti-realist alternatives such as absolute creationism, conceptualism, fictionalism, *ultima facie* strategies, and pretense theory, these considerations go to defeat the Indispensability Argument, the centerpiece of contemporary Platonism. In my studied opinion, both its premises are plausibly false.

But in order to defeat the Indispensability Argument, so bold an opinion need not be defended. It suffices merely to undercut the warrant for one of its premises. Given how controversial the debate over contemporary Platonism is, no view can plausibly commend itself philosophically to the exclusion of all others. In order to undercut the Indispensability Argument, the Christian theologian need not defend any one of these views but can recognize the viability of a plurality of viewpoints. I conclude that the challenge posed by Platonism to the doctrine of divine aseity can be met successfully. The biblical doctrine that God is the sole ultimate reality is eminently reasonable.

5
Simplicity

The doctrine of divine simplicity is typically characterized as the claim that God is utterly without composition, physical or metaphysical. This characterization, though very widespread, both historically and currently, remains ambiguous and therefore of little help unless one clarifies what is meant by "composition." A discussion of this issue takes us into the sub-discipline of metaphysics known as mereology, the study of parts and wholes. One of the central questions of mereology concerns what conditions must be satisfied by any items in order for those items to compose an actual, bona fide object, a question known as the special composition question.[1] Discussions of the special composition question almost invariably concern physical objects, but applied theologically, we may wonder what conditions would have to be fulfilled in order for God to be a composite object.

Crucial to the special composition question and even more directly relevant to the doctrine of divine simplicity is the notion of being mereologically simple. An entity *x* is mereologically simple just in case *x* has no proper parts. But that characterization raises the question as to what necessary and jointly sufficient conditions must be satisfied in order for some object *x* to

[1] See Peter van Inwagen, *Material Beings* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 30–31. Apart from arealism, which denies that there is an answer to the question, three broad perspectives vie against one another: (1) mereological nihilism, which denies that there are any composite objects; (2) mereological universalism, which holds that any two objects, no matter how disparate, compose a third object; and (3) van Inwagen's own view that the only existing composite objects are animate objects.

Systematic Philosophical Theology: On God: Attributes of God, Volume IIa, First Edition.
William Lane Craig.
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be simple, a question which we may call the simplicity question. Stating merely that *x* is simple if and only if *x* has no proper parts would be uninformative, for that requires us to know what counts as a proper part. When Ned Markosian broached this question in 1998, there had been "little or no discussion" of the simplicity question in the recent philosophical literature on the topic of composition; indeed, he says, "I do not know of a single philosopher, recent or otherwise, who has explicitly addressed" this question.[2]

Unfortunately, while acknowledging that "there are interesting questions about non-physical mereological simples," Markosian is not "concerned with any such questions here. That is, I will be concerned here only with questions about physical, mereological simples."[3] As a result, some of the proposed answers he considers to the simplicity question are irrelevant to our concern. Markosian surveys a variety of proposals for answering the simplicity question, including that simples are point-sized objects, that simples are physically indivisible objects, that simples are metaphysically indivisible objects, and that simples are maximally spatially continuous objects. Since God is not a physical object, he is not simple in the sense of being point-sized or maximally spatially continuous;[4] but he is simple in the sense of not being physically divisible, and no doubt he is metaphysically indivisible as well.

It is hard to resist the suspicion that for many theologians who have affirmed divine simplicity, especially historically but even today, simplicity has amounted to nothing more than this. They seem to understand composition to imply something like "assembled" or "constructed out of parts,"

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[2] Ned Markosian, "Simples," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 76 (1998): 213–228. Markosian calls the question "the Simple Question." He has since followed up on his original discussion in a subsequent paper, "Simples, Stuff, and Simple People," *Monist* 87, no. 3 (2004): 405–428, but, unfortunately for us, continues to confine his analysis to physical simples. Kris McDaniel reflects, "We might think that, for any category of entity we care to include in our ontology, it makes sense to divide the entities in that category into those that are simple and those that are complex. Accordingly, it would be nice to have a unified and fully general account of what it is to be a simple *simpliciter*" (Kris McDaniel, "Brutal Simples," in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, ed. Dean W. Zimmerman [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007], 3:243). Unfortunately, most versions of the three kinds of account he considers – spatial accounts, fundamentality accounts, and indivisibility accounts – either do not apply to God or else would be unacceptable to proponents of divine simplicity. Take fundamentality accounts, for example. The property instance version states that *x* is a simple iff *x* instantiates a perfectly natural property (properties that ground objective similarity). The problem here is not merely that "it is possible for mereologically complex objects to instantiate perfectly natural properties" (248), but that proponents of a strong doctrine of divine simplicity do not allow that God instantiates properties. The independence version states that *x* is a simple iff it is metaphysically possible that *x* is the only (material) object that exists. Again, since it is metaphysically possible that God exist alone he counts as simple, even if he is ontologically complex. In the end, McDaniel argues that there are no informative, finitely stateable conditions that are both necessary and sufficient for being a simple and so espouses a brute view of simplicity.

[3] Markosian, "Simples," 3n10.

[4] Though see *infra,* chap. 8, on divine omnipresence, some construals of which take God to be point-sized or maximally spatially continuous, despite his immateriality.

or perhaps "having proper parts more fundamental than the whole" – or at least their arguments for divine simplicity go to support no stronger a conception. Thus, very thin doctrines of divine simplicity might hold one or more of the following:

(DS_1). God is not constructed out of parts.
(DS_2). God does not have parts more fundamental than himself.
(DS_3). God does not have separable parts.

On such thin conceptions, God could still be complex in various ways, such as exemplifying a diversity of properties, which is contrary to the intention of many other defenders of divine simplicity.[5]

Christopher Hughes proposes that we understand divine simplicity straightforwardly as God's mereological simplicity:[6]

(DS). God has no proper parts.

According to (DS) the only part that God could have is an improper part, that single part which is identical to the whole, in this case identical to God himself. (DS) will require defenders of divine simplicity to explain what would constitute a proper part of God, which will lead to a very interesting debate. For example, are the divine attributes parts of God? Are God's essence and existence parts of God? Are the persons of the Trinity parts of God?

In Hughes' opinion, Trinitarian issues aside, there is nothing especially problematic about (DS). Substance dualists take the soul similarly to be simple in such a thin sense, uncomposed of proper parts and indivisible. Rather the *prima facie* problematic claims are those often taken to be implied by (DS), a stronger doctrine of divine simplicity which Hughes calls (DS+), according to which, for example, distinct divine attributes or an essence distinct from existence would be proper parts of God.

Historically, a wide variety of versions of (DS+) have been enunciated. Thomas Aquinas, the preeminent defender of divine simplicity, held to an especially strong version of (DS+), according to which

(NTDT). Neither God and his genus, nor God and his *differentia*, nor God and his accidental forms are two different things.

[5] See Robert M. Burns, "The Divine Simplicity in St. Thomas," *Religious Studies* 25 (1989): 271–293, who emphasizes that the opposite of "simple" is "complex," not "composed."
[6] Christopher Hughes, "Aquinas on the Nature and Implications of Divine Simplicity," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 10, no. 2 (2018): 1.

(OAST) God and his perfections, God and his essence, and God and his existence are one and the same thing.

"NTDT" abbreviates "not two different things," and "OAST" stands for "one and the same thing." Since God transcends the distinction between form and matter, genus and species, substance and accidents, and, we might add, actuality and potentiality, the items listed in (NTDT) cannot be said to be identical with God, since such things as God's matter, genus, species, accidents, and potentiality do not exist at all. Rather they and God are not two different things. But the items listed in (OAST) do exist and so must be identical to God, lest God be composed of proper parts. Thinkers committed to (OAST) thus endorse what is often called "the identity thesis" for God's properties, essence, and existence, for all of these are identical to God and, hence, to one another. But other theologians committed to (NTDT) endorse what is sometimes called "the replacement thesis," according to which God replaces various items like his properties and essence, as well as his genus, differentia, and accidental forms, since these items do not really exist. Contemporary scholars need to be wary of reading strong versions of (DS+) into earlier authors' affirmations of divine simplicity, particularly statements by the Church Fathers or creedal affirmations lacking definition of terms.[7]

Now, obviously, with Thomas' explication of divine simplicity, we find ourselves situated within a metaphysical framework which is so different from that of modernity as to constitute a barrier to understanding. Contemporary Christian philosophers have come to appreciate that patristic and medieval thinkers' doctrines of divine simplicity need to be understood within their own metaphysical systems. Lest Christian systematic theology be held prisoner to a metaphysical framework now widely rejected and regarded as obsolete, however, the task of assessing the doctrine of divine simplicity must not only proceed internally with respect to, for example, a medieval metaphysical framework but must also involve a careful translation of the doctrine into a contemporary framework, where it may be assessed for its coherence and plausibility.

[7] See the careful study of the ante-Nicene Fathers by Pui Him Ip, "The Emergence of Divine Simplicity in Patristic Trinitarian Theology: Origen and the Distinctive Shape of the Ante-Nicene *Status Quaestionis*," (DPhil thesis, Oxford University, 2017). He notes the radical difference between the later doctrine of divine simplicity and the doctrine found in the ante-Nicene Fathers, for whom "divine simplicity means that (a) metaphysically God's nature is perfectly incorruptible, and (b) ethically God's character is perfectly free from contradictions" (9). According to (a) "divine simplicity means that God is metaphysically incomposite, devoid of the possibility of dissolution."

5.1 Biblical Data Concerning Divine Simplicity

Not to get ahead of ourselves, we need to begin by inquiring after the scriptural justification for a doctrine of divine simplicity. The scriptural warrant for God's incorporeality as well as for his aseity and eternality implies a thin doctrine of divine simplicity.[8] Affirmations of God's spirituality (Jn 4.24) and omnipresence (Ps 139.7) show that God is not composed of parts or divisible into undetached parts. Existing *a se* as the sole ultimate reality, the Creator of all things other than himself, God cannot be composed of more fundamental parts. As an eternal being who is permanent in his existence, it is inconceivable that God could somehow dissolve into parts and cease to exist. No biblical author, we may confidently say, feared that God might in time literally disintegrate.

5.1.1 Lack of Scriptural Warrant for (DS+)

That being said, however, it can scarcely be denied that no scriptural warrant exists for a strong doctrine like (DS+). The lack of a strong doctrine of divine simplicity in the Protestant Reformers is due to their emphasis on *sola Scriptura* and their suspicion of a scholastic *theologia gloriae* rooted in Aristotelian metaphysics rather than Scripture, where the doctrine is conspicuously absent.[9] Post-Reformation scholastic theologians, both Lutheran and Reformed, absorbed rather uncritically the Thomistic metaphysical framework, including Thomas' doctrine of divine simplicity, and their efforts to ground such a doctrine biblically are strained.[10]

Modern theologians came to renounce the strong doctrine of divine simplicity as an unbiblical deviation prompted by Greek philosophical influence.[11] At the end of the nineteenth century the influential German theologian Hermann Cremer could complain, "The unfruitfulness of the doctrine of the attributes of God as handled in dogmatics and church teaching up to now is an open secret. No place in dogmatics has the content of the scholastic tradition been less abandoned, nowhere is the formal

[8] See subsections of this locus on biblical warrant for divine incorporeality, aseity, and eternity.

[9] Steven Duby can thus find only the briefest of mentions of divine simplicity by Luther, Calvin, and Melanchthon in his survey of Protestant reaffirmations of the doctrine (Steven J. Duby, *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account,* T & T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology 30 [London: Bloomsbury, 2016], 18–19).

[10] For detailed accounts see Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1752*, vol. 3, *The Divine Essence and Attributes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), chaps. 2–4; Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, vol. 2 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1970), chaps. 2–3.

[11] See brief accounts in Frederik Gerrit Immink, *Divine Simplicity* (Kampen, The Netherlands: J. H. Kok, 1987), 15–26; Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 25–34.

solution to the problem more sought via the path of scholastic conceptual analysis than here."[12] Cremer thinks that "the difference between the practical interest of faith in God's revelation in Christ and the scientific formulation of the concept and doctrine of God has not been strongly enough perceived."[13] Cremer wants to lay out the doctrine of God's diverse attributes like holiness, wisdom, omnipotence, omnipresence, eternity, and so on, in accord with revelatory religion (*Offenbarungsreligion*). Unfortunately, Cremer's salutary emphasis on biblical revelation is accompanied by an unconcealed antipathy toward the questions and methods of philosophy, which Cremer finds altogether misguided. He distinguishes the question of absolute being which philosophy poses and can never answer and the question of history which revelation answers through Christ. In place of "philosophical speculation" about God as "pure being," Cremer would substitute God's historical revelation in Christ as a solution to sin and death. Divine revelation is thus played off against philosophical theology. "We are directed to revelation because we have in it the reality of God, a reality that shows us the right question and at the same time the answer."[14] Twentieth century theologians like Emil Brunner and Karl Barth followed in the train of pursuing *Offenbarungsreligion* while disparaging philosophical theology.

So John Feinberg reports, "In consulting various systematic theologies, one is hard pressed to find one that offers biblical support for the notion" of divine simplicity.[15] The efforts on the part of modern theologians

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[12] D. H. Cremer, *Die christliche Lehre von den Eigenschaften Gottes,* Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie 4 (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1897), 7.

[13] Cremer, *Eigenschaften Gottes,* 15.

[14] Cremer, 16.

[15] John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God,* Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 327. Feinberg overlooks the work of Wayne Grudem in favor of classical theologians like Louis Berkhof and Herman Bavinck. Although Grudem's discussion is ambiguous, he appears to hold to divine simplicity in some sense, since he affirms that God is "not composed of parts" (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994], 177). The divine attributes are therefore not parts of God; rather "each attribute is simply a way of describing one aspect of God's total character or being," where aspects apparently do not constitute parts either (Grudem, 179–80). As justification for this doctrine Grudem says, "When Scripture speaks about God's attributes. . . there is an assumption that every attribute is completely true of God and is true of all of God's character. . . . There is no suggestion that part of God is light and part of God is love or that God is partly light and partly love. Nor should we think that God is more light than love or more love than light. Rather it is *God himself* who is light, and it is *God himself* who is also love" (Grudem, 78). This argument is multiply confused. In the first place, God's having attributes as metaphysical parts does not imply the sort of prioritizing of attributes that Grudem rejects. More fundamentally, what Grudem seems to be getting at is, not that God is identical to each of his attributes, but that the various divine attributes are predicated of God, not of parts of God. In the predication of some divine attribute Fa, God rather than some part of God is the individual a to which the predicate F is assigned. That goes without saying, since it is God who is omnipotent, holy, wise, etc.; this is perfectly compatible with a's being composite, as when some attribute is predicated of a man. Grudem's discussion remains unchanged in his 2020 second edition.

standing in the tradition of Reformed scholasticism to justify the doctrine biblically overreach. For example, Herman Bavinck attempts to prove that "every attribute of God is identical with his essence" on the grounds that "Scripture, to denote the fullness of the life of God, uses not only adjectives but also substantives: it tells us not only that God is truthful, righteous, living, illuminating, loving, and wise, but also that he is the truth, righteousness, life, light, love, and wisdom."[16] This argument is terribly weak, for as Feinberg points out, it is guilty of trying to read metaphysical implications off the surface grammar of ordinary language sentences.[17] By the same procedure, one could use other biblical passages to show that God possesses the relevant property rather than is identical to it. It is dubious, to say the least, that the biblical writers in either case want to teach some metaphysical doctrine about the relation of God to his attributes. They simply want to say that God is loving, truthful, wise, and so on without making recondite metaphysical commitments.

Almost alone among contemporary defenders of divine simplicity, Steven Duby and Jordan Barrett maintain that the doctrine of divine simplicity is based wholly on Scripture. Barrett claims that "the origin of divine simplicity is not Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, natural theology, substance metaphysics, or perfect being theology. Rather, Scripture is the source of its motivation and content even if its form and terminology. . . is borrowed from outside Scripture."[18] Barrett argues that the doctrine of divine simplicity is "a conceptual elaboration of two biblical teachings, specifically the divine name(s) and the indivisible operations of the Trinity."[19] Duby for his part argues that simplicity "is a divine attribute rooted in Holy Scripture's portrayal of God in his singularity, aseity, immutability, infinity and work

[16] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 2:173. Bavinck's prooftexts are Jer 10.10; 23.6; Jn 1.4–5, 9; 14.6; I Cor 1.30; I Jn 1.5; 4.8. Remarkably, some of these passages are not even *prima facie* identity statements, while others clearly employ metaphors (e.g., light). For the same argument see Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1968), 62. Ironically, since these same substantives are used of Christ, such an overreading of Scripture collapses the distinction between the divine essence and the divine persons, thus subverting the doctrine of the Trinity.

[17] Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 329.

[18] Jordan P. Barrett, *Divine Simplicity: A Biblical and Trinitarian Account*, Emerging Scholars (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 1.

[19] Barrett, *Divine Simplicity*, 137; see chap. 5: "Biblical Roots of Divine Simplicity." In the tradition of Reformed theology, Barrett understands the term "divine name(s)" to refer not only to God's proper names but also to attributes of any description. His biblical survey shows that "Yahweh is called gracious and just, merciful and judge, forgiving and punishing. Far from having a divided nature full of tensions, God's nature has no conflict but is rich in its diversity" (155). As for the operations of the Trinity *ad extra*, while "the incarnation is the becoming human of the Son and not the Father or Spirit. . . none of this denies that the Father and Spirit are involved in the one action of the incarnation" (157).

of *creatio ex nihilo*" and therefore "is not an iteration of the project of 'perfect being' theology, but rather an exercise in Christian dogmatics."[20]

Nonetheless, the difference in the doctrine of divine simplicity thought by these authors to be implied by Scripture is striking. Barrett holds that the Bible teaches that God has a rich diversity of essential attributes which together constitute his essence. God is simple in not being composed of separable parts. Duby, by contrast, thinks that biblical teaching implies that God is simple in the strongest sense of the word, any distinctions in God being merely conceptual.

Barrett thus actually denies a strong doctrine of divine simplicity in favor of a version which is so modest as to be soporific: "Divine simplicity is a concept that elaborates what is implicit in scripture's depiction of God – namely, that the divine attributes and the divine essence are identical, whereas the divine attributes are distinct from one another. . . . the simplicity of God affirms one nature in multiple and distinct perfections."[21] Barrett denies that biblical teaching implies "a radical doctrine of divine simplicity," according to which all of God's attributes are identical.[22] He recognizes that this position actually "aligns me with some of the contemporary critics of divine simplicity."[23] Biblical simplicity in Barrett's hands thus does not amount to much: "This multiplicity of names and operations do not reveal God to be partially holy, partially good, or partially loving. . . . Instead,

[20] Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 2. Contrast James Dolezal, who argues that "Simplicity is indispensable for the traditional understanding of doctrines such as God's aseity, unity, infinity, immutability, and eternity" (James E. Dolezal, *God without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness* [Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011], 67). Dolezal apparently maintains that divine simplicity is explanatorily prior to these other attributes. The problem with such a claim is that while we can agree that simplicity entails certain other attributes like timelessness and immutability, nevertheless "the fecundity of this attribute for deriving others of God's attributes, and its framework significance, are quite beside the point unless one has good reason for holding that God is simple" (Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Divine Simplicity," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 531). After all, an incoherent doctrine explains nothing. For Duby, dogmatics adheres closely to Scripture: "the work of dogmatics is principally that of the rational ordering and elaboration of dogmata, or the articles of faith delivered in the scriptural teaching" (*Divine Simplicity*, 55). Citing R. W. L. Moberly with approval, Duby holds that the extra-biblical categories employed in dogmatics play a heuristic role: "it is neither possible nor desirable to try to interpret the Bible without making heuristic use of post-biblical categories. . . . What matters is less whether the category is biblical or postbiblical than whether it (negatively) does not force the biblical context into inappropriate moulds but (positively) enables penetrating grasp of the nature and content of the biblical text" (R. W. L. Moberly, "How Appropriate Is Monotheism as a Category for Biblical Interpretation?," in *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism*, ed. Loren T. Stuckenbruck and Wendy E. S. North [London: T & T Clark, 2004], 218), cited by Duby (*Divine Simplicity*, 55). Classical metaphysics, Duby avers, "has only a ministerial role in Christian Theology" (Duby, 128). Such a role obviously involves tight scriptural constraints upon a doctrine of divine simplicity. Duby adopts "a Thomistic Reformed orthodox metaphysic for explicating biblical teaching and, in view of God's aseity and the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, holds this metaphysic as a matter of theological principle" (80).

[21] Barrett, *Divine Simplicity,* 32, 34.

[22] Barrett, 43.

[23] Barrett, 182.

all that God is *is* holy, good, and loving."[24] Biblical divine simplicity holds merely that "God is rich and multiple without being composite or divisible into parts."[25]

Duby, on the other hand, argues at length that Scripture teaches each of the aforementioned attributes or works of God and then, using the resources of Thomistic Reformed philosophy, infers from them a full-blown doctrine of (DS+), thus arriving at a position very different from Barrett's. Duby's fundamental mistake lies in thinking that by inferring divine simplicity from these other scripturally supported divine attributes or acts he is providing scriptural justification for simplicity, when an examination of his arguments reveals that in fact it is the reasoning of perfect being theology, not Scripture, that is bearing the weight of the argument. Sometimes he overreads the scriptural evidence for the attribute in question (e.g., immutability), but more often he relies on philosophical arguments involving substantive metaphysical commitments to move from the biblical attribute to the affirmation of simplicity.[26]

Consider, for example, God's singularity.[27] Duby has no difficulty in showing that the Bible teaches that there is but one God. But does the Bible imply that that one God is simple? Duby argues that there are at least four ways in which the biblical God's uniqueness entails that he is simple: (i) God's singularity entails the identity of nature and *suppositum* in God, which means that God is deity itself subsisting. (ii) God's singularity entails that he transcends the categories of genus and species and so is not composed of genus and species. (iii) God's singularity implies that God is really identical with each of his perfections. (iv) God's singularity implies broadly that all that is in God is really identical with God himself (*quod habet, quod est*) and that there is therefore no composition whatsoever in God. These arguments are instances of medieval perfect being theology based on extra-biblical, substantive metaphysical assumptions.

More specifically, (i) presupposes a medieval constituent ontology involving natures and *supposita*, hardly a teaching of Scripture! Duby notes that Scripture sometimes speaks of the divine nature (Rom 1.20; Gal 4.8; II Pet 1.4) and human nature (Acts 14.15; Jas 5.17). But such ordinary language expressions do not imply a constituent ontology according to which things are really composed of a nature and a *suppositum*. When Duby asserts

[24] Barrett, 161.
[25] Barrett, 182.
[26] See especially Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 74–76 on the metaphysical assumptions he employs in a dogmatic account of divine simplicity.
[27] Duby, 91–108.

that *deity* "has always been particular, personal and actual in and as God,"[28] far more than a heuristic use of Thomistic Reformed terminology is in play; these are substantive metaphysical commitments that are not incumbent upon the biblical believer. Similarly, (ii) presupposes the objective validity of a classificatory scheme of genus and species which is nowhere taught in Scripture. When Duby asserts that "Genus is essence conceived generally and without differentiation into various species, while species is essence taken specifically and completely" in order to argue that "the uniqueness of the biblical God implies that the divine essence cannot be restricted in or shared by different kinds of beings,"[29] he is importing metaphysical assumptions into biblical teaching. As for (iii), when Duby asserts that "In created substances, accidents. . . are derived from or adventitiously adjoined to the *substantia,*" so as to argue that "God's uniqueness and particularity imply that he does not eternally individuate accidental forms or properties but rather is each of his perfections or properties subsisting,"[30] he again presupposes the truth of a medieval constituent ontology which is not implied by Scripture. We may wholeheartedly endorse Duby's admonition that "one must not assume Platonic realism and read the discussion of divine simplicity in light of it. Instead, we should follow the revelation of God's singularity in Holy Scripture."[31] God's revelation in Scripture has not, however, disclosed to us the truth of a medieval constituent ontology of substance and accidents. Finally, with respect to (iv), when Duby quotes with approval Anselm's judgement that "Every composite that subsists requires the things from which it is composed, and it owes that it is to those things,"[32] in order to argue that there is no composition in God, we have a clear example of classic perfect being theology, based on a medieval constituent ontology. One is therefore astonished when Duby makes so bold as to conclude, "in this section the exegetical material, rather than an a priori set of philosophical assumptions, has impelled the movement toward divine simplicity even as certain philosophical terms have been invoked for elaborative purposes."[33]

Or consider divine aseity.[34] Duby endorses a rich conception of divine aseity, according to which aseity is not merely God's being the sole ultimate reality but is "his independence, primacy, plenitude, perfection, and

[28] Duby, 102.
[29] Duby, 103.
[30] Duby, 106.
[31] Duby, 107.
[32] Duby, 107.
[33] Duby, 108.
[34] Duby, 109–132.

freedom of contrariety toward creation."[35] God's aseity is said to imply divine simplicity in at least five ways: (i) Divine aseity entails that God is *actus purus*. (ii) God's aseity implies that he is his own divinity subsisting and is therefore not composed of nature and *suppositum*. (iii) God's aseity implies that God or God's essence is *ipsum esse subsistens* and is therefore not distinct from his own existence as *ens* from *principium entis*. (iv) God's aseity implies that he is really identical with each of his attributes and is therefore not composed of substance and accidents. (v) God's aseity implies broadly that he is simple in every way and has no composition whatsoever. Here again we have classic perfect being theology that is based upon extra-biblical metaphysical assumptions.

Specifically, (i) presupposes a metaphysical distinction between act and potency not drawn from Scripture in order to deny such a composition in God. Duby insists, "It must be emphasized that it is not an a priori and generic perfect being theology that legislates the conceptualization of divine perfection here but rather the witness of Holy Scripture. . . that requires us to ascribe to God a fullness of goodness, love, power and so on that cannot at all be enlarged or intensified, which requires us then to say that God is *actus purus*."[36] Yes, Scripture teaches divine perfection, but it is Duby's last clause that adverts inevitably to perfect being theology, since Scripture knows nothing of the metaphysical distinction of act and potency. As for (ii) we have again the assumption of a medieval constituent ontology. Duby thinks that we are forced to such a conclusion: "In different ways, both a 'relation' ontology and an Aristotelian philosophical apparatus conceive (created) things to be what they are by derivation, but the biblical text impresses upon us God's self-referential completeness, sufficiency and ultimacy, which implies that he is what he is *per se* and as deity itself subsisting, rather than *per participationem*."[37] I agree that Scripture precludes God's depending for his being or nature upon independently existing abstract objects, but that does not imply that God is deity itself subsisting unless we assume that the only alternative to a relational ontology is a medieval constituent ontology. (iii) involves an argument from perfect being theology that presupposes, among other things, a real metaphysical distinction between essence and existence not to be found in

[35] Duby, 131.
[36] Duby, 122.
[37] Duby, 124.

Scripture but in Thomas Aquinas' metaphysics.[38] In explicating (iv), Duby not only presupposes once again the metaphysical distinction of substance and accidents, but also naively assumes a jointly exhaustive disjunction of a Platonistic relational ontology and a medieval constituent ontology when he contends, "God himself is to be regarded as the fullness of each of his perfections subsisting, lest he should be righteous, good and so on *per participationem* in order to be as he is and act as he does."[39] Finally, (v) is an explicit exercise in perfect being theology: "If there were parts in God, these would stand prior to God and furnish his being: 'parts from which he would be composed would be prior to God, at least in the order of nature as a cause'."[40]

There is, I think, no need to belabor the point by further examining Duby's treatment of God's immutability, infinity, and creation of the world *ex nihilo*, for the pattern is clear. An attribute of God is established biblically, and then divine simplicity is deduced therefrom employing arguments of perfect being theology based on a range of substantive (and highly disputable) metaphysical assumptions. The use of Thomistic Reformed metaphysics is not merely terminological or heuristic, as Duby avers, but substantive. Conclusions are based squarely on the truth of metaphysical

[38] Duby explains:

> Thomas' line of reasoning is apt here. Whatever is other than the essence of a given thing is derived 'either from the principles of the essence, as proper accidents following species. . . or from something exterior'. Therefore, if God's existence were objectively distinct from his essence, it would be caused either by God's essence or by an external principle or agent. But it cannot be caused by God's essence, for this would entail that God would cause himself to be. Nor can it be caused by another, for, according to God's aseity in Holy Scripture, God receives nothing from another, least of all his very existence. Therefore, his *essentia* is identical to his *esse*, and he himself, then, is *ipsum esse subsistens* (*Divine Simplicity*, 125).

This passage well illustrates the alliance of Scripture and perfect being theology. Scripture teaches divine aseity; and perfect being theology, on the basis of an extra-biblical metaphysical assumption of the real distinction between essence and existence, infers from God's aseity that God is existence itself subsisting. As Duby puts it, "God is recognized to be *a se* and absolute without drawing from and residing under another ontological source, which is then the rationale behind the denial of complexity or composition in God" (130). The recognition is derived from Scripture; the explication of the rationale is perfect being theology.

[39] Duby, 127. Duby seems to undermine his own claim to be arguing independently of perfect being theology when he admits, "the *assumption* here is that the accidents in view would be qualities that function so as to perfect God's being. By contrast, the *assumption* in several of the analytic writers is that the relevant accidents are largely merely contingent *predicates* to be applied to God (Creator, Lord and so on), which illumines why the inclusion of accidents is found to be tenable or, indeed, necessary in theology proper" (Duby, 128, my emphasis). The assumptions in question are clearly extra-biblical and substantive, not merely heuristic. If the relevant accidents are mere predicates, they do not affect God's being. Duby's subsequent reflections are an exercise in perfect being theology, not dogmatic theology as he defines it.

[40] Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 129, citing scholastic theologian Amandus Polanus (1561–1610). Duby is then compelled to engage the objection that there might be no ontological priority of God's parts to God, so that while God is complex, he is not compounded. Never mind Duby's attempt to refute the idea of divine complexity without composition; the point is that he has left Scripture far behind and is embarked on a substantive metaphysical debate among persons who alike affirm the biblical doctrine of divine aseity.

assumptions which are extra-biblical in nature. Like his Reformed scholastic forebears, who thought that the doctrine of divine simplicity could be established biblically, Duby is strangely oblivious to the degree to which metaphysical assumptions are being read into biblical teaching.

5.1.2 Incompatibility of (DS+) with Scripture

Moreover, (DS+) is not, like God's broadly logically necessary existence, merely unbiblical in the sense of not being taught by Scripture, but actually contrary, at least *prima facie*, to scriptural teaching and therefore ruled out for any biblically adequate systematic theology. Historically, orthodox Muslims and Jews were clear-sighted in this regard.[41] Most fundamentally, Scripture teaches that we have an accurate, if not comprehensive, knowledge of God's essential properties. Not that Scripture commits us to the existence of properties in a metaphysically heavyweight sense, much less to a view of what properties are. We speak here of properties in a metaphysically lightweight sense. Scripture affirms that God is immaterial, personal, holy, self-existent, almighty, all-knowing, everywhere present, eternal, and so on and so forth, so that as a result of his self-revelation in Scripture we have a very good idea of what God is like. Moreover, given the prominence and centrality of such divine properties in the Bible, it is plausible that they are essential to God.[42] It is unthinkable that biblical writers might have considered holiness or aseity or eternity to be properties which God merely happens to have but might have lacked, so that God could have been morally flawed, dependent for his existence upon something else, or mortal. Anything so characterized would not deserve to be called God. Finally, in Scripture these attributes are predicated of God univocally. When God is said to be holy and loving and righteous, it is taken for granted that these predicates have the same meaning that they do in discourse about creatures. Of course, creatures may possess such properties only to a finite

[41] David Burrell describes the impasse that resulted from the confrontation of the doctrine of divine simplicity with scriptural revelation:

> That impasse became the scene of bitter collisions opposing philosophically-minded Muslims to the vast majority who took their cues from the Qur'an. The devotion of believers spontaneously attached to the evocative names of God, and when these beliefs met the philosophers' insistence on simpleness, the philosophical doctrine could hardly stand the onslaught. Those insisting on the *reality* of divine attributes won the day, even if they could only assert that such manifest multiplicity need not compromise their fundamental belief in the unity of God. . . .
>
> Maimonides' expressed clarifications – 'God lives, but not by life' – show how clear he was about subordinating attributes to God's unitary nature, yet his celebrated agnosticism regarding them brought him also into conflict with the religious-minded in his community (David B. Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986], 54–55).

[42] As pointed out by Brian Leftow, *God and Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 412–413.

degree or not at all, whereas God possesses them to a maximal or unlimited degree, but the meaning of the predicates is the same.[43] For example, when it is taught that God is self-existent and creatures are not, the meaning of the predicate, whether affirmed or denied, is the same. There is no suggestion in Scripture that these words have a different meaning when used of God; on the contrary, it is assumed that the meaning is the same. The fact that we can have an accurate, if not comprehensive, positive knowledge of God's essential attributes is incompatible with agnosticism about God's essence, so that any doctrine of divine simplicity which implies such agnosticism by, for example, identifying God's essence with his existence, which is inconceivable, is precluded.

Moreover, Scripture teaches that God has unactualized potentialities, indeed, one wants to say, unlimited potentiality. Again, we are speaking in a metaphysically lightweight sense. God has the unlimited ability to do things that he does not do. According to Scripture God is changing in his actions toward the world, and, most dramatically, God could have chosen not to create the world at all. "Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for thou didst create all things, and by thy will they existed and were created" (Rev 4.11). There are, then, possible worlds in which God does differently than he does in the actual world. This truth is incompatible with doctrines of divine simplicity according to which God is pure actuality, with no passive potentiality, or God's action is identical to his essence.

Furthermore, Scripture teaches that God creates, knows, and loves creatures. Accordingly, any doctrine of divine simplicity that entails that God stands in no real relations to the world is *prima facie* contrary to scriptural teaching. In combination with Scripture's teaching that God could have acted differently than he does, God's being really related to the world implies that God has contingent as well as essential properties. For example, God is contingently the cause of the world, knowledgeable of what is going on in the world, and loving of the persons he has made. All this is incompatible with any doctrine of divine simplicity that holds that all that God is he is essentially, that there is nothing contingent in God.

Moreover, God exists in the same sense that creatures exist. That is to say, predications of existence are also univocal with respect to God and creatures. When the author of Hebrews says, "Whoever would draw near

[43] It is fruitless to deny the univocity of predicates applied to God and creatures on the grounds of analogical predication. For as Scotus understood, without a univocal core meaning, analogical predications become equivocal and therefore meaningless when applied to God. So analogical language, yes, but always with a core of univocal meaning.

to God must believe that he exists," he assumes the ordinary meaning of "exists" (*estin*). To be sure, God exists *a se* whereas creatures exist *ab alio*. God's mode of existence may also be different than creatures', God existing necessarily and creatures contingently. But in these affirmations the meaning of "exists" is the same, something like "has extra-mental reality" or "is opposed to nothingness," to borrow a Scotist phrase. A complete ontological inventory would include both God and creatures, the one independent and the other dependent, but both real. Accordingly, any doctrine of divine simplicity denying the univocity of "being" or "existence" for God and creatures is ruled out.

Finally, Scripture, insofar as it contains embryonically the doctrine of the Trinity, implies that God is complex. There are three, nonidentical persons whom the NT calls divine. The personal distinctions are inviolable. God is tri-personal and therefore complex even if partless. This teaching is incompatible with any doctrine of divine simplicity holding that God is devoid of complexity.

Prima facie, then, Scripture is sharply at odds with (DS+). It has been a watchword of classic Reformed theology that "As God reveals himself, so is he."[44] Unfortunately, this ringing affirmation has been muted by the doctrine of (DS+). Colin Gunton warns, "what might appear to be a proper human modesty before the divine can turn into the supreme blasphemy of denying revelation."[45] What one commentator has called "the twisted roots" of the strong doctrine of divine simplicity[46] are to be found not in Scripture but in Neo-Platonism, particularly in the doctrine of the One of Plotinus. It is testimony to the overwhelming influence of Greek thought upon the Judeo-Christian tradition that so many Christian, Jewish, and Muslim thinkers eventually came to embrace a doctrine so at odds with biblical teaching.

5.2 Roots and Development of Divine Simplicity

We cannot hope in so short a compass to survey adequately the history of thought on the doctrine of divine simplicity. But perhaps we can touch briefly upon some of the highlights of that history in order to illustrate my claim that there has not been a unified doctrine of divine simplicity over the ages.

[44] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2: 111.
[45] Colin Gunton, *Act and Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 36.
[46] William Hasker, "Is Divine Simplicity a Mistake?," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 90, no. 4 (2016): 700.

5.2.1 Neo-Platonic Roots

The doctrine of (DS+) is rooted in the philosophy of Plotinus (204/5–270/1). According to Plotinus the metaphysical ultimate from which all reality flows is an undifferentiated unity which he variously called the First or the One or, in Platonic terminology, the Good. But he insisted that any such label for the metaphysical ultimate is simply for want of any better way to refer to it, since, being utterly simple, it is beyond description and beyond conceiving.[47] Plotinus is led to postulate this ineffable One as a consequence of the drive to find some sort of unifying principle behind the multiplicity, not merely in the sensible world, but also of the ideal realm: "The Intellectual Cosmos thus a manifold, Number and Quantity arise. . . . What is the Simplex preceding this multiple; what is the cause at once of its existence and of its existing as a manifold; what is the source of this Number, this Quantity? Number, Quantity is not primal: obviously even before duality, there must stand the unity."[48]

The reason Plotinus took it as obvious that unity must precede multiplicity ontologically, though not temporally, is that unity is the ground of being for things. Something exists only insofar as it is unified as one thing.[49] Things that are composite cannot be the ground of their own being; there must be something metaphysically prior which makes them a unity. "Any manifold, anything beneath The Unity, is dependent: combined from various constituents, its essential nature goes in need of unity; but unity cannot need itself; it stands unity accomplished."[50] So "Above all, unity is The First. . . . for any member of the realm of Forms is an aggregation, a compound, and therefore – since components must precede their compound – is a later."[51] If, then, we consider all particular beings, "Much more must Collective Being, as container of all existence, be a manifold and therefore distinct from the unity in which it is but participant. . . . Unity cannot be the total of beings for so its oneness is annulled."[52]

Plotinus' impetus toward a simple metaphysical ultimate is itself deeply rooted in pre-Socratic philosophy and perhaps, provocatively, in ancient

[47] "That awesome Prior, The Unity, is not a being, for so its unity would be vested in something else: strictly no name is apt to it, but since name it we must there is a certain rough fitness in designating it as unity with the understanding that it is not the unity of some other thing" (Plotinus, *Enneads* V.5).
[48] Plotinus, V.4–5.
[49] "It is in virtue of unity that beings are beings. This is equally true of things whose existence is primal and of all that are in any degree to be numbered among beings. What could exist at all except as one thing?" (Plotinus, VI.1).
[50] Plotinus, VI.6.
[51] Plotinus, VI.2.
[52] Plotinus, VI.2.

Egyptian religion. With respect to the Greek tradition, Plotinus scholar Lloyd Gerson observes,

> A central axiom of that tradition was the connecting of explanation with reductionism or the derivation of the complex from the simple. That is, ultimate explanations of phenomena and of contingent entities can only rest in what itself requires no explanation. If what is actually sought is the explanation for something that is in one way or another complex, what grounds the explanation will be simple relative to the observed complexity. . . . Taken to its logical conclusion, the explanatory path must finally lead to that which is unique and absolutely uncomplex.[53]

Plotinus himself lists among his precursors Parmenides, who embraced a monistic worldview, and Anaxagoras, who affirmed a simple and separate One.[54]

It is an intriguing historical note that Plotinus was a native Egyptian, educated in the academy at Alexandria. As such he must have been familiar with ancient Egyptian mythology. Over the course of its long history since the beginning of the third millennium B.C., Egypt developed a basic metaphysical and religious worldview that came to varying expression in four predominant cult centers at Memphis, Heliopolis, Hermopolis, and Thebes. The metaphysical worldview underlying all of these religious perspectives was the view that reality is ultimately one, an underlying, undifferentiated unity.[55] Multiplicity emerges from this primordial underlying unity. The unfolding of primordial oneness into multiplicity takes form primarily in the process of theogony, the emergence of the gods, who in turn create the world. It is striking that the modifications which Plotinus introduced into Platonism, thus giving birth to the intellectual tradition known as Neo-Platonism, have to do precisely with the drive to unification in an absolutely simple unity from which multiplicity arises. Plotinus' view of the One is a sort of demythologized Egyptian religion. Interestingly, in his *Enneads*, written during his teaching tenure in Rome, Plotinus does refer to Greek mythology, which would have been more familiar than Egyptian mythology to his students there, as embodying the truths he taught.[56]

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[53] Lloyd Gerson, "Plotinus," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2018 Edition), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/plotinus.

[54] Plotinus, *Enneads* V.8–9.

[55] See Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many,* trans. John Baines (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982).

[56] Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.7. The *Hermetica,* monistic religious treatises circulating among Egyptian Hermetists 100–300 B.C. under the name of the syncretistic god Hermes Trismegistus, may also have been known to Plotinus.

Plotinus is next only to Plato and Aristotle in the enormous influence exerted by his metaphysical worldview. Neo-Platonic influences were absorbed into Christian theology through figures like Origen (185–253), who was trained, like Plotinus, under Ammonius Saccas in Alexandria, the Cappadocian Fathers Basil (330–379) and Gregory Nazianzus (329–390), who both studied philosophy in Athens, and Augustine (354–430), who had read Plotinus' works. Still, we do not find in these thinkers a full-blown doctrine of divine simplicity. We must sturdily resist the temptation to read into patristic writers medieval doctrines of divine simplicity because of shared vocabulary. Statements by the Fathers on divine simplicity are ambiguous due to the fact that patristic writers use terms like "simple" and "composite" with different meanings and without any acknowledgement of this equivocation.[57] Irenaeus (130–202) affirmed that God is

[57] So Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 9. For a survey of various understandings of the doctrine see Gavin Ortlund, "Divine Simplicity in Historical Perspective: Resourcing a Contemporary Discussion," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16, no. 4 (2014): 436–453. Thus, the oft-quoted statement of Richard Muller that "The doctrine of divine simplicity is among the normative assumptions of theology from the time of the church fathers, to the age of the great medieval scholastic systems, to the era of Reformation and post-Reformation theology, and indeed, on into the succeeding era of late orthodoxy and rationalism" (Muller, *Divine Essence and Attributes*, 39), is, when taken out of context, grossly misleading, since, as Muller himself explains, theologians did not understand by "simplicity" the same thing. Hence, Thomas McCall's reluctance to challenge the doctrine of divine simplicity because "I find implausible the notion that virtually the entire church was so wrong – and, if the critics are right, so *obviously* wrong, and so obviously and *devastatingly* wrong – about something so central" (Thomas H. McCall, "Trinity Doctrine, Plain and Simple," in *Advancing Trinitarian Theology: Exploration in Constructive Dogmatics,* ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014], 43), is quite misplaced, since, as he acknowledges, there is no uniformly held doctrine of divine simplicity.

Similarly, some contemporary theologians have expressed reluctance to dissent from the doctrine of divine simplicity on the grounds that, according to Lewis Ayres' account of the Nicene controversy in his *Nicaea and Its Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), the doctrine of divine simplicity lay at the very heart of the pro-Nicene theologians' defense of the doctrine of the Trinity. This impression is, however, based upon misunderstanding. What Ayres argues is that the *grammar* of simplicity, not the *doctrine* of simplicity, lay at the heart of the pro-Nicene defense, serving the function of affirming the unity of the divine nature and so the indissoluble unity of the distinct Trinitarian persons (279; cf. 14–15). Ayres agrees with the judgement of Christopher Stead that the church fathers did not even have a consistently articulated doctrine of divine simplicity, but expressed themselves "rather loosely" in this regard (281) and "do not always explain coherently what they mean by simplicity" (287n41). Ayres does not respond to Stead's pointed critique of the compatibility of a strong doctrine of divine simplicity with the distinctness of the Trinitarian persons but rather complains that Stead fails to understand the *function* of appeals to divine simplicity, which is primarily to set the conditions for all talk of God as analogical (287). Ayres thinks that a vague and incoherent grammar can fulfill that function. "Pro-Nicenes are loose and inconsistent in their definitions of simplicity, but this inconsistency does not necessarily prevent them using the doctrine in very similar ways. The language of simplicity is inseparable from the language of divine incomprehensibility and gives rise to 'formal features' of divine being that should govern all our speech about God" (287). In construing divine simplicity as a formal feature of discourse about God, however, Ayres is himself is guilty of anachronistically imputing to these patristic thinkers David Burrell's strong, high medieval Muslim-Thomistic construal of divine simplicity, according to which simplicity is not itself a divine attribute but rather is a formal constraint on the doctrine of God, stipulating that God quite literally has no attributes. Burrell is, of course, correct with regard to the high medieval conception, but the Nicene theologians constantly speak of divine simplicity as a particular attribute of God. The attempt of certain contemporary Thomists to co-opt the label "classical theism" to designate their own view ought therefore to be firmly resisted.

simple merely in the sense that he is not composed of separable parts.[58] Athanasius' (296/8–373) conception was even weaker: "For, if he united from parts, he would appear wholly unlike to himself and have fulfilment from unlike things."[59] Hilary's (310–367) affirmation is similarly thin: "God is simple. . . . And he is not so diverse with parts of a composite divinity that there should be in him either will after stupor, or work after idleness."[60] As we have seen, Origen, despite his Neo-Platonic training, affirms that God is simple in the sense that he is incorporeal and indivisible like the human mind.[61] Basil and Gregory of Nyssa (335–395), in their battle with

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[58] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* II.13.3–5. For a detailed study see Ip, "Emergence of Divine Simplicity," chap. 3. Against a bizarre emanationism of his Gnostic opponents, according to which divine faculties are emitted by God as separate beings, Irenaeus maintains that

> "If then, even in the case of human beings, understanding itself does not arise from emission, nor is that intelligence which produces other things separated from the living man, . . . much more will the mind of God, who is all understanding, never by any means be separated from himself; nor can anything [in his case] be produced as if by a different Being.
>
> For if he produced intelligence, then he who did thus produce intelligence must be understood, in accordance with their views, as a compound and corporeal Being; so that God, who sent forth [the intelligence referred to], is separate from it, and the intelligence which was sent forth separate [from him]. But if they affirm that intelligence was sent forth from intelligence, they then cut asunder the intelligence of God, and divide it into parts".

Irenaeus is intent on denying that, like men, who "are compound by nature and consist of a body and a soul," God is composed of separable parts; neither does he have "human affections and passions," as the Gnostics imagine. "For the Father of all is at a vast distance from those affections and passions that operate among men. He is a simple, uncompounded Being, without diverse members, and altogether like, and equal to himself, since he is wholly understanding, and wholly spirit, and wholly thought, and wholly intelligence, and wholly reason, and wholly hearing, and wholly seeing, and wholly light, and the whole source of all that is good." Such a doctrine is very far from the Neo-Platonic conception of the One. To be sure, Irenaeus does say that God is "above [all] these properties and therefore indescribable," but that is due, not to divine simplicity, but to the fact that "the Father of all is in no degree similar to human weakness" but is incomparably great.

Ip potentially risks misleading his readers by stating that Irenaeus affirmed the "identity thesis" of simplicity theorists, for, as he explains, "Irenaeus' 'identity thesis' entails that (a) God is not divisible into parts like bodies, (b) the activities of the divine Mind cannot be divided into distinct stages . . . . So by claiming that God is 'identical' with his perfections, what Irenaeus is affirming is that none of the divine perfections could turn out to be contrary to the divine nature" (Ip, "Emergence of Divine Simplicity," 85–86).

[59] Athanasius, *Oration against the Gentiles* I.28. Moreover, as historical context shows, what Athanasius meant was physical parts, not metaphysical parts. See Ip, "Emergence of Divine Simplicity," who shows that when the Apologists affirmed that God is non-composite, they meant "that he is incorporeal in the case of Justin, ungenerated and without parts in the case of Athenagoras" (29). In general God was taken to be non-composite in that he is incorporeal, primordial, always equal and self-same, and having no causal inferiority associated with the possession of parts (25).

[60] Hilary, *On the Trinity* IX.72.

[61] He writes,

> "God, therefore, is not to be thought of as being either a body or as existing in a body, but as an uncompounded intellectual nature [*simplex intellectualis natura*], admitting within himself no addition of any kind; so that he cannot be believed to have within him a greater and a less, but is such that he is in all parts Μονάς, and, so to speak, Ἑνάς, and is the mind and source from which all intellectual nature or mind takes its beginning. But mind, for its movements or operations, needs no physical space, nor sensible magnitude, nor bodily shape, nor colour, nor any other of those adjuncts which are the properties of body or matter. Wherefore that simple

the Arian theologian Eunomius of Cyzica (d. 393), confronted head on an advocate of Neo-Platonic divine simplicity and, as we shall see in our next section, repudiated it in favor of a much more modest conception. We shall also find that Augustine, too, did not embrace divine simplicity as it came to be later understood.

5.2.2 Cappadocian Fathers

Eunomius, in the name of divine simplicity, pressed a powerful objection against the proponents of Nicene orthodoxy. Also a product of the academy in Alexandria, Eunomius, in line with a Neo-Platonic conception of divine simplicity, denied that God has a plurality of properties. On the basis of Ex 3.14 he took God's essence to be identical to his existence. Eunomius understood the single property which God is to be *ungeneracy* or *unbegottenness* (*agennēsia*), a not implausible suggestion in view of God's aseity, which many theologians have identified as the most fundamental of the divine attributes. God is the sole ultimate reality, who depends on nothing. Accordingly, if God the Father is unbegotten (*agennētos*) and his Son begotten (*gennētos*), as the Nicene Creed affirms, then the Son does not share the divine essence (*ousia*) and so is not God.[62]

At the heart of the Cappadocians' multi-layered response[63] to Eunomius lay their rejection of Eunomius' Plotinian doctrine of divine simplicity.

> and wholly intellectual nature [*natura illa simplex et tota mens*] can admit of no delay or hesitation in its movements or operations, lest the simplicity of the divine nature should appear to be circumscribed or in some degree hampered by such adjuncts, and lest that which is the beginning of all things should be found composite and differing, and that which ought to be free from all bodily intermixture, in virtue of being the one sole species of Deity, so to speak, should prove, instead of being one, to consist of many things. That mind, moreover, does not require space in order to carry on its movements agreeably to its nature, is certain from observation of our own mind" (Origen, *On First Principles* I.1.6).

According to Ip, the burden of Origen's metaphysical doctrine was to affirm divine incorporeality (Ip, "Emergence of Divine Simplicity," 32). "According to Origen, divine simplicity implies that God's nature is free from material composition that would violate his self-sameness: God is a purely intellectual existence. However, divine simplicity also implies that God is one in that he is perfectly self-consistent" (174).

[62] As Gregory summarizes the argument, Eunomius holds that "God is called Unbegotten; but the Divinity is by nature simple; and what is simple admits of no composition. If therefore God is by nature uncompounded, and the name 'Unbegotten' applies to him, then 'Unbegotten' is the name of his very nature, and his nature is nothing else than unbegottenness" (Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* [*Against Eunomius*] II.23. Translation by S. G. Hall).

[63] Radde-Gallwitz, *Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 141, lists the many reasons on the basis of which Basil denies that ungeneracy is identical to the divine nature or essence:

> 1. "Ungenerate" tells us only *how* God is, not *what* God is, whereas essences are given in answer the question, "What is it?"
> 2. "Ungenerate" is a relational rather than an absolute term, being used interchangeably with "Father," and relational terms never name essences.
> 3. "Ungenerate" names a property peculiar to the Father, just as "generate" names a property peculiar to the Son, and no such properties that distinguish individuals sharing a common essence are part of the common essence itself.

They affirmed in several ways the complexity, if not the compoundedness, of God. At the most basic level, there is a distinction between God's being simple and his being ungenerate. "What we assert is this: each of the words has its own connotation, and 'indivisible' is not implied by 'unbegotten', nor 'unbegotten' by 'simple'. Rather, by 'simple' we understand 'uncompounded', and by 'unbegotten' we learn that something has no originating cause."[64] *Prima facie*, this would imply a plurality of properties possessed by God.[65] So in response to Eunomius,

> we assert that 'uncompounded' means one thing and 'unbegotten' another: one expresses the simplicity of the subject, the other the fact that it derives from no cause; the connotations of the terms do not overlap, even though both are used of the one subject. Rather, we learn from the adjective 'unbegotten' that what is so described has no causal origin, from 'simple' that it is free from composition; neither term is used as substitute for the other. So it does not necessarily follow that, because the Divinity is by nature simple, his nature is defined as 'unbegottenness'; rather, inasmuch as he is without parts and uncompounded, he is said to be simple, and inasmuch as he has not been begotten, unbegotten.[66]

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4. "Ungenerate" tells us only what God is not, namely, subject to generation, whereas all essential attributes name real properties.

Eunomius could avert objections (1), (2), and (4) by substituting for *ungeneracy* the equivalent, non-relational, positive property *self-existence*, which would suit his purposes just as well. In that case (3) would become crucial. Then the Cappadocians' further claim that *ungeneracy* is not a real property of the Father but merely the result of conceptualization (see note 71) will prove important for defending the persons' simplicity.

[64] Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* II.28. Joseph O'Leary comments that "Unfortunately, 'unbegottenness' has a confusing amphibolous status. It names the divine essence if taken in the sense of uncausedness (*agenētos*) . . . whereas in its trinitarian sense (*agennētos*) as signifying the unbegottenness of the Father, it has a special status which Basil and Gregory do not always sufficiently distinguish" (Joseph S. O'Leary, "Divine Simplicity and the Plurality of Attributes (*CE* II 359–386; 445–560)," in *Gregory of Nyssa: "Contra Eunomium" II: An English Version with Supporting Studies*, ed. Lenka Karfíková, Scot Douglass, and Johannes Zachhuber [Leiden: Brill, 2007], 314). Had Eunomius identified the divine essence with uncausedness, then the Cappadocians would not have regarded his position as inimical to the deity of the Son.

[65] It sometimes seems that the Cappadocians accept an understanding of divine simplicity akin to Irenaeus', according to which simplicity amounts to not being composed of separable parts. See Gregory's characterization of the simplicity of the Son's essence:

> "Do they own that his essence is simple, or do they suppose that in it there is any sort of composition? If they think that he is some multiform thing, made up of many parts, assuredly they will not concede him even the name of Deity, but will drag down their doctrine of the Christ to corporeal and material conceptions: but if they agree that he is simple, how is it possible in the simplicity of the subject to recognize the concurrence of contrary attributes?" (*Contra Eunomium* X.4).

But elsewhere Gregory seems to agree that a subject's having a property is sufficient to introduce composition into it: "The Life, [Eunomius] says, is nothing but the essence, or else some element of composition might be attributed to the simple Nature, which would thus be divided into the attribute and the subject of the attribution. Rather, he says, what the Life is, the essence is. He does well to philosophize in this way; no reasonable person would deny that these things are so" (Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* II.483).

[66] Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* II.24–25.

By thus distinguishing between simplicity and unbegottenness, the Cappadocians could then proceed to distinguish between God's nature (or essence), which they held to be simple and unknowable, and his other various properties like *unbegottenness*.[67] His nature, whether in the sense of a concrete individual nature or in the sense of a generic essence,[68] is given in a definition of what God is, which definition escapes us. In addition to his nature God also has necessarily various other properties (*propria*). In order to illustrate the difference between God's nature and his *propria*, the Cappadocians borrowed illustrations from Plotinus' biographer Porphyry which would also be adopted by medieval theologians, such as *risibility*, a property that follows from but is not part of man's nature of rational animality. Thus, Gregory writes, "For this name [i.e. 'God'], which indicates the substance, does not tell us what it is (which is obvious since what the divine substance is is inconceivable and incomprehensible). Rather, since it is drawn from some *proprium* that belongs to the substance, this name intimates the substance, just as when we say 'neighing' and 'laughing', which are *propria* of natures, we signify the natures of which they are *propria*."[69] Gregory identifies a number of such divine *propria*, such as goodness, power, wisdom, life, and incorruptibility, which he styles "virtues" or "goods."[70] Gregory held these divine virtues to be non-identical but necessarily co-extensive. The Cappadocians denied that *ungeneracy* is part of the divine nature, for that nature, whatever it is, is shared by the Father and the Son; rather *ungeneracy* is uniquely predicated of the Father.

Thus, the Cappadocians' response to Eunomius depends on their rejection of his strong doctrine of divine simplicity. They undermined the Neo-Platonic doctrine of divine simplicity held by Eunomius in multiple ways: first, by distinguishing between the simple, ineffable divine

[67] Thus, Gregory affirms that "The notion of unbegottenness is one thing, the definition of the divine essence another" (*Contra Eunomium* II.380). So if Eunomius is saying "that the Father's essence exists unbegotten, I agree with what he says and do not oppose his assertion," but if he means that "unbegottenness itself is [the] essence," then Gregory disagrees (II.379). Cf. Basil *Adversus Eunomium* [*Against Eunomius*] II.29.23–36. Radde-Gallwitz comments that the Cappadocians were quite consistent "in, on the one hand, offering descriptions of the common divine substance, and, on the other, holding it to be incapable of being defined. These descriptions name proper characteristics or *propria*, but not definitions, of the divine substance" (*Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 155–156).

[68] As noted by McCall, "Trinity Doctrine, Plain and Simple," 47. McCall, whose interest is Trinitarian doctrine, notes that the Cappadocians also distinguish between the divine nature and the divine persons, thereby introducing complexity into God (McCall, 47; cf. Radde-Gallwitz, *Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 215–217).

[69] *To the Greeks from Common Notions* III.1. Porphyry had written: "For even if man does not always laugh, he is said to be laughing not in that he always laughs but in that he is of such a nature as to laugh – and this holds of him always, being connatural, like neighing of horses. And they say that these are properties in the strict sense, because they convert: if horse, neighing; and if neighing, horse" (*Introduction* [*Eisagōgē*] XII.13–21).

[70] For discussion see Radde-Gallwitz, *Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 182–212.

nature and God himself; second, by distinguishing between God's nature and his *propria*; third, by attributing to God a multiplicity of *propria* which are non-identical though co-extensive.[71] Did they also ascribe to God contingent properties like *being the Creator*? They may have done. For Gregory indicts the Eunomians for their inconsistency precisely on this score: "Since they call the Father both Creator and Maker, whereas he who is so called is simple in regard to his essence, it is high time for such sophists to declare the essence of the Father to be creation and making, since the argument about simplicity introduces into his essence any signification of any name we give to him."[72] It is assumed that such predicates ascribe real properties, but since these could be neither constitutive of the divine nature nor *propria* necessarily possessed by God, they would have to be,

[71] If the Cappadocians applied their distinctive doctrine of "conceptualization" (*epinoia*) to the divine *propria*, they could avoid making them ontological constituents of God. Conceptualization, says Gregory, "is the way we find out things we do not know, using what is connected and consequent upon our first idea of a subject to discover what lies beyond" (Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* II.182). It seems to be something like what we would term conceptual analysis. Distinctions made conceptually need not imply ontological commitments to the things distinguished. For example, Aristotle distinguished conceptually between a thing's essence and its existence without making an ontological commitment to such things, as did later medieval philosophers, who treated the distinction as real. The Cappadocians held the Father to be ungenerate but took *ungeneracy* to be a product of conceptualization having no referent in reality. If the divine *propria* are similarly products of conceptualization, as Gregory sometimes seems to suggest (*Contra Eunomium* II.501–503), then they need not be ontological constituents of God. Radde-Gallwitz initially argued that the Cappadocians did not take divine *propria* to be mere products of conceptualization: "One might assume that Basil thinks that all theological thinking happens by way of conceptualization, but this would be mistaken. Conceptualization is a process of reflecting on other concepts, which are somehow more basic. . . . it is logically necessary that there be theological 'data', so to speak, that are not the product of conceptualization" (Radde-Gallwitz, *Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 154, 178). These basic concepts "are concepts of the essential properties of God" (154). More recently, Radde-Gallwitz has expressed greater sympathy for a conceptualist reading (Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, "Gregory of Nyssa and Divine Simplicity: A Conceptualist Reading," *Modern Theology* 35, no. 3 (2019): 452–466). But he seems to be advocating merely a nominalist or anti-realist view of God's properties, which is wholly compatible with denying, e.g., that omnipotence is omniscience (466). Gregory seems to be affirming no more than that God's properties are co-extensive. Radde-Gallwitz writes,

> "Gregory says that God is 'all things at once' (ὁμοῦ τὰ πάντα). This phrase has a long philosophical prehistory, but most pertinently is a favorite expression for Plotinus when denoting the simultaneous presence of all intelligible reality in Intelligence (νοῦς). According to Plotinus, while such a state is more integrally one than anything we can experience through discursive reasoning, it is nonetheless inaccurate to speak of νοῦς as simple insofar as it is both one and many rather than a pure unity; for Gregory, by contrast, even the human mind can be spoken of as simple. For Gregory, God's being all perfections at once is compatible with, indeed is the essence of, divine simplicity" (464).

Since for Plotinus the Nous, unlike the One, is not simple, Gregory's affirmation that God (not to speak of the human mind!) is simple in virtue of being all his perfections at once, shows merely that Gregory has a vastly weaker conception of simplicity than did Plotinus.

[72] Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* II.31, in the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* translation. He proceeds, "Either, then, let them separate ungeneracy from the definition of the Divine essence. . . or, if by reason of the simplicity of the subject they define his essence by the term ungeneracy, by a parity of reasoning let them likewise see creation and making in the essence of the Father, not as though the power residing in the essence created and made, but as though the power itself meant creation and making" (II.32). Gregory thus anticipates the modal collapse objection to divine simplicity.

accordingly, contingent properties of God. Radde-Gallwitz concludes that the Cappadocians, in effect, gutted Eunomius' doctrine of divine simplicity, the same doctrine later to be propounded by Thomas Aquinas in a vastly more sophisticated version.[73]

5.2.3 Augustine

Augustine seems to have imbibed Neo-Platonic tradition more thoroughly than the Cappadocians, though even in his case interpretation is difficult. We seem to have a baptized Neo-Platonism in his affirmation, "There is, accordingly, a Good which is alone simple, and therefore alone unchangeable, and this is God. By this Good have all others been created, but not simple, and therefore not unchangeable."[74] But what does Augustine understand by his affirmation that God is simple?

Sometimes he speaks of God as being simple in the sense that God's attributes are essential to him, equal in degree, and necessarily co-extensive.[75] Just as there is "an absolutely inseparable and eternal union" of the three persons of the Trinity,[76] there could be analogously such a union of the divine attributes in God's essence. Such a view is compatible with God's being composed of inseparable metaphysical parts.

But elsewhere Augustine seems to shut out the possibility that God's attributes can be construed as parts of God. Again, the analogy in this regard between the Trinitarian persons and the divine attributes is interesting. In inquiring how the divine substance is "both simple and manifold," Augustine points out that no bodily substance is simple, since it is composed of parts that are individually not as great as the whole: the whole is greater than its (proper) part. Although God is not a bodily substance, still if we think of the Trinitarian persons as parts of God, then we must say that the persons taken together collectively are greater than each individual

[73] Radde-Gallwitz, *Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 5, 122.
[74] Augustine, *The City of God* XI.10.
[75] For example, he writes:

> "For in like manner the virtues which are in the human mind, although each has its own several and different meaning, yet are in no way mutually separable; so that, for instance, whosoever were equal in courage, are equal also in prudence, and temperance, and justice. . . . How much more therefore is this the case in that unchangeable and eternal substance, which is incomparably more simple than the human mind is? Since, in the human mind, to be is not the same as to be strong, or prudent, or just, or temperate; for a mind can exist, and yet have none of these virtues. But in God to be is the same as to be strong, or to be just, or to be wise, or whatever is said of that simple multiplicity, or multifold simplicity, whereby to signify his substance" (Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity* VI.4.6; cf. VI.5.7).

[76] Augustine, VI.4.6.

person.[77] But for Augustine each divine person is as great or perfect as all three together.[78] So although the divine persons are not identical, neither are they parts of God.[79] Hence, God is simple though a Trinity. Similarly, just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not identical even though they are not parts of God, so the divine attributes could be non-identical though not parts of God. So long as we do not think of God's attributes as parts of God, God's having a multiplicity of distinct attributes does not compromise his being simple in the sense of being partless.

In yet other places, however, Augustine seems to construe divine simplicity as incompatible with a plurality of non-identical attributes despite their not being parts. He seems to affirm that the divine attributes are not merely co-extensive but identical and, moreover, that God himself is

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[77] Augustine explains, "Neither, since he is a Trinity, is he therefore to be thought triple, otherwise the Father alone, or the Son alone, will be less than the Father and Son together" (VI.4.9). For God as a whole would not be identical to one of his personal parts, though each part will be identical to itself.

[78] He writes:

> "The Father alone, or the Son alone, or the Holy Spirit alone, is as great as is the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit together. . . . In God himself, therefore when the equal Son. . . is joined to the equal Father, God does not become greater than each of them severally; because that perfectness cannot increase. But whether it be the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit, he is perfect, and God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is perfect; and therefore he is a Trinity rather than triple" (VI.8.9).

[79] Augustine explains that in speaking of the Holy Spirit as "another than the Father and the Son:"

> "I say 'another,' not 'another thing,' because he is equally with them the simple Good, unchangeable and co-eternal. And this Trinity is one God; and none the less simple because a Trinity. . . . the nature of the good is simple . . . because it is what it has, with the exception of the relation of the persons to one another. . . . But, as regards himself, irrespective of relation to the other, each is what he has; thus, he is in himself living, for he has life, and is himself the Life which he has. . . . It is for this reason, then, that the nature of the Trinity is called simple, because it has not anything which it can lose, and because it is not one thing and its contents another, as a cup and the liquor, or a body and its color, or the air and the light or heat of it, or a mind and its wisdom. For none of these is what it has: the cup is not liquor, nor the body color, nor the air light and heat, nor the mind wisdom. And hence they can be deprived of what they have, and can be turned or changed into other qualities and states, so that the cup may be emptied of the liquid of which it is full, the body be discolored, the air darken, the mind grow silly" (*City of God* XI.10).

Augustine recognizes that in the case of something composed of inseparable parts, the danger of loss does not exist. But he adds,

> "The incorruptible body which is promised to the saints in the resurrection cannot, indeed, lose its quality of incorruption, but the bodily substance and the quality of incorruption are not the same thing. For the quality of incorruption resides entire in each several part, not greater in one and less in another. . . . The body, then, which is not in each of its parts a whole body, is one thing; incorruptibility, which is throughout complete, is another thing" (XI.10).

Note that incorruptibility, like the soul, "is not diffused in bulk through extension of place" but is wholly present in each part and so is "more simple than the body" (Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity* VI.6.8). Nevertheless, incorruptibility, though inseparable, is "another thing" from the whole body. But since God is not composed of parts, none of his attributes is "another thing" than he is. Just as no person of the Trinity is another thing even though the persons are not identical, so God's attributes, though distinct, are not parts of God.

identical with his attributes.[80] The Augustinian maxim that "The nature of the good is simple. . . because it is what it has, with the exception of the relation of the persons to one another"[81] seems to entail that God is identical to each of his attributes.

But even here there is scope for interpretation. Leftow reminds us that Augustine was a Platonist, for whom abstract terms like "wisdom" denote what Plato called Forms.[82] Normally, things have a quality by "participation" (some sort of relation involving similarity and derivation or dependence) in a Form. Since God is in no way dependent or derivative, God does not have his qualities by participation in Forms. Thus, Augustine says, the persons of the Trinity have unity of substance, "not by participation, but by their own essence, neither by the gift of any superior, but by their own."[83] So when Augustine asserts that God is the wisdom he has, he identifies God with a Form – or, more exactly, according to Leftow, he asserts that a term otherwise taken to refer to a Form refers in fact to God.[84] This is

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[80] Augustine asks, "do goodness. . . and righteousness differ from each other in the nature of God, as they differ in his works, as though they were two diverse qualities of God – goodness one, and righteousness another? Certainly not; but that which is righteousness is also itself goodness; and that which is goodness is also itself blessedness" (*On the Holy Trinity* XV.5.7). The point may be generalized:

> "if we say, Eternal, immortal, incorruptible, unchangeable, living, wise, powerful, beautiful, righteous, good, blessed Spirit; only the last of this list. . . seems to signify substance, but the rest to signify qualities of that substance; but it is not so in that ineffable and simple nature. For whatever seems to be predicated therein according to quality, is to be understood according to substance or essence. For far be it from us to predicate Spirit of God according to substance, and good according to quality; but both according to substance" (XV.5.8).

Note that Augustine uses "substance" and "essence" as synonymous terms. He means thereby to refer to a thing characterized non-relationally. He explains, "when we speak of a man, or any such thing which is said in respect to self, not to something else, then essence is intimated. . . . the man, and the horse, and the money are spoken in respect to themselves, and are substances or essences; but master, and slave, and beast of burden, and pledge, are spoken relatively to something" (VII.2.2). So "those things which are essentially and truly divine are called simple, because in them quality and substance are identical and because they are divine, or wise, or blessed in themselves, and without extraneous supplement" (Augustine, *City of God* XI.10). For this reason, "the same God himself may be called his own deity, his own magnitude, his own goodness, his own eternity, his own omnipotence" (Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity* V.10.12).

[81] Augustine, *City of God* XI.10.

[82] See Augustine, *Eighty-Three Different Questions* 46.2.

[83] Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity* VI.5.7. Even in the case of qualities possessed unchangeably, a thing does so by participation in the appropriate Form: "although incorruptibility is inseparable from an incorruptible body, yet the substance of the body is one thing, the quality of incorruption another. And therefore the body is not what it has. The soul itself, too, though it be always wise (as it will be eternally when it is redeemed), will be so by participating in the unchangeable wisdom, which it is not" (Augustine, *City of God* XI.10).

[84] Brian Leftow, "Divine Simplicity," *Faith and Philosophy* 23, no. 4 (2006): 366. A creature is like God by having a relation of similarity to something distinct from himself, whereas God is like God simply by being himself (375). So Augustine says, "what else do we say when we say, that to him to be is the same as to be wise, unless that he is that whereby he is wise?" (*On the Holy Trinity* VII.2.2). Again, "For God does not receive wisdom from any one as we receive it from him, but he is himself his own wisdom; because his wisdom is not one thing, and his essence another, seeing that to him to be wise is to be" (XV.6.9). The same analysis can be extended to the other attributes: "For what to be wise is to wisdom, and to be able is to power, and to be eternal is to eternity, and to be just to justice, and to be great to greatness, that being itself

not an identity thesis but a replacement thesis: "Augustine identifies God with Forms to eliminate the Forms and have God take over their role in the theory of attributes."[85] Leftow thinks that Augustine, following one strand in Plato,[86] treats Forms as standards for evaluating their participants. For example, says Leftow, "If 'wisdom' refers to a standard for wisdom, it refers to a perfect case of wisdom, to which other cases may measure up. . . . for Augustine, God, not God's wisdom, is the standard case of wisdom. One is wise by so 'participating in' God that one counts as wise."[87] Thus, the claim that God is identical to some quality that creatures can share really means that God is identical with the standard for that quality. Augustine's view does not imply that, for every non-relational attribute *F*, if God is *F*, then God is identical to *F*-ness, but rather that if God is *F*, God is the standard for being *F*.[88] Where an attribute is degreed, as in the case of omnipotence or omniscience, only a maximal degree case of it can be the standard.

Important implications follow from Leftow's interpretation: Augustine's doctrine of divine simplicity does not identify God with an attribute. Neither does it identify God's attributes with one another. It asserts only that God is the standard for those various attributes. Leftow provides an engaging illustration how one thing can serve as the standard for two distinct attributes: "If the standard meter bar weighs a kilogram, it can be both the standard meter and the standard kilo, without having it follow that being a meter long = weighing a kilo, or that to be measured in length is to be measured in weight."[89] Similarly God can be the standard for all the various qualities listed by Augustine without those qualities' being identical with one another. Leftow opines that his illustration is nonetheless defective: "The standard meter bar can also be the standard kilo because it has two distinct attributes (weight and length). If God is simple,

is to essence. And since in the Divine simplicity, to be wise is nothing else than to be, therefore wisdom there is the same as essence" (VII.2.2).

[85] Leftow, "Divine Simplicity," 367. "Augustine took God as the paradigm replacing all Forms God might have in common with creatures: his 'what he has, he is' identifies with God Forms in which God might participate and thereby eliminates the Forms" (370–371).

[86] Most famously, Plato's Form of the Good is the standard by which things count as good in terms of their resemblance to the paradigm of goodness.

[87] Leftow, "Divine Simplicity," 370.

[88] Leftow, 372; cf. 365. It is instructive to contrast the interpretation of William Hasker, who, while recognizing Augustine's commitment to Platonic participation, thinks that Augustine's doctrine of divine simplicity implies the identity thesis, with disastrous results for the distinctness of the trinitarian persons. Hasker's interpretation forces him to surmise that Augustine did not have a modern conception of identity; rather "the relation Augustine had in mind (perhaps, vaguely and inchoately in mind), was not identity as we understand it but rather some other 'sameness' relation" (William Hasker, *Metaphysics and the Tri-personal God*, Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013], 245; cf. 61). Hasker's suggestion that Augustine lacked a modern conception of the identity relation is quite plausible; but Augustine's commitment to Platonic participation nonetheless favors the replacement thesis.

[89] Leftow, "Divine Simplicity," 372.

he does not."[90] This misgiving seems to forget that on Leftow's interpretation Augustine's doctrine of divine simplicity does not imply that God's attributes are identical. There is room in his view for different attributes of God so long as God himself is the standard for each of them.[91]

One final consideration concerning Augustine's doctrine of divine simplicity deserves to be broached: his doctrine of the divine ideas. Augustine rejected as sacrilegious the notion that there might be a realm of uncreated, eternal Platonic Forms independent of God.[92] He therefore, along with Middle Platonists like Nicomachus of Gerasa and Hellenistic Jews like Philo of Alexandria, moved the realm of the Forms into the divine mind as thoughts of God.[93] For Middle Platonists and Philo, the intelligible world (*kosmos noētos*) served, as for Plato, as a model for the creation of the sensible world (*kosmos oratos*) but does not exist independently of God; rather it exists as the contents of his mind, the divine Logos. The Logos doctrine was adopted by the Greek Apologists as a way of grounding the intelligible realm in God rather than in some independent realm of self-subsisting entities like numbers or forms.[94] Like Philo and the Middle Platonists Augustine associates the Forms with the Logos, who for him, as for the Greek Apologists, is the second person of the Trinity: "the Form according to which a creature is created exists first in the Word of God before the actual creation of the work itself."[95] Leftow has recourse to these divine ideas as the standard for predicates which are not common to God and creatures, such as "is blue."[96] What is significant for our purposes is that Augustine, unlike Aquinas, makes no serious effort to eliminate the plurality of divine ideas, which insouciance goes to confirm that his concern was not to enunciate what later became the strong doctrine of divine simplicity.

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[90] Leftow, 372.

[91] Thus, there is no need to face the objection that "it remains unclear how one simple item can be the standard for two attributes" (Leftow, 372), for God need not be simple in that sense.

[92] "As for these reasons (*rationes*), they must be thought to exist nowhere but in the very mind of the Creator," he wrote. "For it would be sacrilegious to suppose that he was looking at something placed outside himself when he created in accord with it what he did create" (Augustine, *Eighty-Three Different Questions* XLVI.2.21–32).

[93] Nicomachus of Gerasa, *Introduction to Arithmetic*; Philo *On the Creation of the World according to Moses* 16–20, 24. For an account see my *God and Abstract Objects: The Coherence of Theism III: Aseity* (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 2017), chap. 2.

[94] See Harry Austryn Wolfson, "The Logos and the Platonic Ideas," chap. 13 in *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, vol. 1: *Faith, Trinity, and Incarnation*, 3rd ed. rev. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

[95] Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* II.8.17, 16. Leftow notes that Augustine can also locate the ideas in the Father and Spirit (Leftow, "Divine Simplicity," 368, citing Augustine, *True Religion*, liii, 113 and *City of God* XI.10).

[96] Leftow, "Divine Simplicity," 380.

5.2.4 Anselm

In eleventh century Europe, Anselm (1033/4–1109) is typically thought to have embraced a strong doctrine of divine simplicity. He affirms, for example, that God's nature "is in no respect composite" and that all of his perfections "must be one rather than many. Hence, each one of them is the same as all [the others] – whether they be considered distinctly or all together."[97] But appearances may be deceiving. At the end of his study of Augustine's doctrine of divine simplicity, Leftow muses that Anselm is so thoroughly Augustinian that one would be surprised if he did not see the doctrine Augustine's way.[98] A reading of Anselm's *Monologion* seems to bear out Leftow's suspicion. Contrary to the conventional interpretation, Anselm does not seem to embrace the thesis that God is identical to his perfections or that they are identical to one another. Rather, like Augustine, Anselm is a Platonist in that he thinks of predications, not in terms of things' possessing properties, but in terms of things' participation in Forms. Since God is the Supreme Being, he cannot have his perfections by way of participating in a Platonic Form, for that would fatally compromise divine aseity. Rather God must himself play the role ascribed to Forms in the Platonic metaphysic. Anselm thus embraces, not an identity thesis, but a replacement thesis, according to which God himself replaces the many Forms.[99] Just as *Justice* is for Plato just through itself, so for Anselm God is just through himself:

> when we call [the Supreme Being] just or great (or any such thing), perhaps we are indicating not what it is but rather what kind of thing it is

[97] Anselm, *Monologion* 17. It is not clear whether Anselm, like the Cappadocian Fathers, means to speak of the simplicity of the divine nature or substance or essence rather than of God. He denies, for example, that relational predicates "apply to the substance of the thing of which they are predicated relationally. Therefore, if some [word] is predicated of the Supreme Nature relationally, [this word] does not signify its substance" (15). Again, none of the terms predicated relationally "unqualifiedly exhibits the essence of anything" or "designates the simple substance of the Supreme Nature" (15). These qualifications might lead us to think that for Anselm God could possess essential properties not definitive of his essence or even contingent properties. On the other hand Anselm's vigorous repudiation of a divine constituent ontology, especially in the *Proslogion*, inclines me to think that his arguments would preclude God's being ontologically composed of his nature and properties. So words like "nature," "substance," and "essence" are probably used to refer to God himself.

[98] Leftow, "Divine Simplicity," 377.

[99] As Immink cautions,

> "It may seem that Anselm is a straightforward Platonist, for that which is identical in the various goods seems to be a Form, and the idea that that thing through which all goods are good is itself a great good is also found in the Platonic tradition. Despite these formal similarities Anselm's view is really quite different. The good through which all goods are good is not a Form, but God himself. God is good through himself and every other good is good through him" (Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 111).

Immink's exposition of Anselm's view is flawed only in that Immink takes Anselm to endorse the identity thesis: "He proposes an *identity* between God and each of his perfecting properties" (121). But this thesis would make God a quality, which on Anselm's view is metaphysically impossible. Note that this problem is not avoided, *pace* Immink, by denying that properties are for Anselm independently existing abstract objects, for, whatever they are, God is not a quality.

> or of what magnitude it is. Indeed, each of these [predicates, viz., 'just' and 'great'] seems to be predicated with respect to quality or to quantity; for whatever is just is just through justice (and likewise for other [predicates] of this kind). Therefore, the Supreme Nature is just only through justice. Hence, it seems that the supremely good Substance is called just by participation in a quality, viz., justice. But if so, [i.e., if the Supreme Substance were just in this way], then [the Supreme Substance] would be just not through itself but through something other [than itself]. But this [view] is contrary to the truth which we have already seen: viz., that – whether good or great or existing – what [the Supreme Nature] is, it is completely through itself and not through something other [than itself]. So if it is just only through justice, and if it can be just only through itself, what is more clear and more necessary than that this Nature is justice?[100]

There is thus, in Immink's words, an "evaluative aspect" to Anselm's realism: "The Divine Word is considered to be the *ultimate standard of what ought to be*."[101] Anselm writes, "The Supreme Nature is supremely whatever good thing it is. Therefore, the Supreme Nature is Supreme Being, Supreme Life, Supreme Reason, Supreme Refuge, Supreme Justice, Supreme Wisdom, Supreme Truth, Supreme Goodness, Supreme Greatness, Supreme Beauty, Supreme Immortality, Supreme Incorruptibility, Supreme Immutability, Supreme Beatitude, Supreme Eternity, Supreme Power, Supreme Oneness."[102] Creaturely things have qualities which vary in degree according to their resemblance to God. Indeed, Anselm even seems to embrace the notion that there are degrees of being, so that some things can be said to scarcely exist.[103] Hence, for God to be justice or power or eternity is for God to be the standard for the possession of that quality, not for God to be a quality.

On Anselm's view a wide array of perfections may be truly predicated of God, but such predicates do not entail that God is actually composed of such perfections as metaphysical parts. On the one hand, "necessarily, the Supreme Being is living, wise, powerful and all-powerful, true, just, blessed, eternal, and whatever similarly is in every respect better than its negation."[104] On the other hand, these perfections are not metaphysical

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[100] Anselm, *Monologion* 16. "Through no other than through itself is this Being as good as it is or as great as it is" (15). "Every being exists more and is more excellent to the extent that it is more like that Being which exists supremely and is supremely excellent" (31).
[101] Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 103.
[102] Anselm, *Monologion* 16.
[103] Again, I think that appearances are deceiving, however; for what Anselm means is that whereas God exists necessarily, timelessly, and immutably, creatures exist contingently, transiently, and mutably (*Monologion* 28, 31).
[104] Anselm, 15.

parts of which God is composed: "If the Supreme Nature is so many goods, will it be composed of so many goods, or are they, rather than being many goods, [only] one good signified by so many names? For everything composite needs for its existence the parts of which it is composed; and what it is it owes to its parts. For through them it is whatever it is, whereas what they are they are not through it; and so, it is not at all supreme."[105] Never mind the cogency of Anselm's argument for God's not being composed of more fundamental parts; the salient point is that on his view we can truly predicate many different perfections of God without those perfections' being ontological constituents of God. Anselm makes a nominalistic move in affirming that the divine perfections are the one Good, that is God, signified by many different names. In saying that the perfections predicated of God differ in name only, he is not claiming that these predicates all have the same meaning but that they all refer to God himself, not to various parts of God, as the standard of that perfection.

In his *Proslogion* Anselm expands on his denial that God is composed of parts:

> Surely, You are life, wisdom, truth, goodness, blessedness, eternity – You are every true good. These are many things; and my limited understanding cannot in a single view behold so many at one time in order to delight in all together. How is it, then, O Lord, that You are all these things? Are they Your parts, or, instead, is each one of them the whole of what You are? For whatever is composed of parts is not absolutely one but is in a way many and is different from itself and can be divided actually or conceivably. But these [consequences] are foreign to You, than whom nothing better can be thought. Hence, there are no parts in You, O Lord. Nor are You more than one thing. Rather, You are something so one and the same with Yourself that in no respect are You dissimilar to Yourself. Indeed, You are Oneness itself, divisible in no respect. Therefore, life and wisdom and the other [characteristics] are not parts of You but are all one thing; and each one of them is the whole of what You are and the whole of what all the others are.[106]

Here Anselm presents a different argument for God's perfections' not being parts of God: parts are divisible, actually or conceptually, which Anselm takes to be incompatible with God's supremacy. This argument would preclude not merely fundamental parts of God but even parts posterior to the whole. Anselm also implies that parts may be said to be dissimilar

[105] Anselm, 17.
[106] Anselm, *Proslogion* 18.

to the whole, perhaps in that the whole is greater than its proper part. The argument does not preclude that we may conceptually distinguish God's perfections from one another, so long as those perfections are not taken to be parts of God. Anselm thus roundly rejects a constituent ontology with respect to God: "whatever [the Supreme Being] in some respect essentially is is the whole of what it is."[107]

If this is correct, then we should understand the following passage, quoted earlier, not as an endorsement of the identity thesis, but as a rejection of a constituent ontology for God:

> Therefore, since this Nature is in no respect composite and yet is in every respect those very many goods [listed above], all those goods must be one rather than many. Hence, each one of them is the same as all [the others] – whether they be considered distinctly or all together. For example, when [this Nature] is said to be justice or being, [these predicates] signify the same thing as do the other [predicates], whether considered distinctly or all together. Thus, even as whatever is predicated essentially of the Supreme Substance is one, so whatever the Supreme Substance is essentially it is in one way, in one respect.[108]

The fact that the divine perfections are not parts of God does not imply that, for example, omniscience is goodness or that being eternal is not different than being omnipresent. God is the standard of all perfections, and his perfections, though non-identical, are not constituents of God.

5.2.5 Medieval Muslim and Jewish Philosophers

After the sixth century the Aristotelean corpus was lost in the Greco-Roman world but preserved in Muslim culture. Greek philosophical thought was introduced into medieval Islamic culture by Mu'tazilite theologians in the ninth century, whence it flowered into movements in both theology (*kalām*) and philosophy (*falsafa*). In medieval Islamic philosophy we find a strange brand of Plotinus and Aristotle, an amalgam aptly described as a "synthesis of Neoplatonic metaphysics, natural science, and mysticism: Plotinus enriched by Galen and Proclus."[109] Philosophy in the Arabic world sprang out of the translation movement, which imported Greek philosophy ready-made to Arabic writers. The Caliphs encouraged the translation of

[107] Anselm, *Monologion* 17.
[108] Anselm, 17.
[109] R. Arnaldez, "Falsafa," in *Encyclopaedia of Islām*, edited by B. Lewis, Ch. Pellat, and J. Schacht, (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 2: 769–775.

Greek works into Syriac and Arabic, thus preserving in the Muslim world what was lost in the West, until it should be returned again centuries later via Jewish theologians. The translation movement had drawbacks that were to have a marked impact upon Islamic philosophy. For example, the influential *Theology of Aristotle* was actually a translation of Plotinus' *Enneads* 4–6, wrongly ascribed to the Stagirite, and the *Liber de causis* was actually excerpted from Proclus' "Elements of Theology." The Arabic philosophers were under the impression that these Neo-Platonic works were authored by Aristotle himself and so firmly believed that Aristotle and Plato were in agreement on the one true philosophy.

Reflecting Plotinus' influence, the Arabic philosophers held God to be the One from whom all multiplicity and matter emanate. But reflecting Aristotelian influence, they did not want their First Principle to be beyond Being, for metaphysics is the study of Being as Being and of the One as well. Thus they brought the One into Being and brought the world out of the One in a series of successive emanations, which correspond to the system of the Aristotelian spheres. In order to avoid a panentheism inimical to Islam, they made the One a necessary being in whom essence and existence are not distinct, whereas in all other beings such a distinction holds. Nevertheless, the universe is in a sense necessary, for it was not created freely but emanates necessarily from the One. Thus the world exists as necessarily as the One, but in dependence upon it, whereas the One exists independently.

Already in al-Kindi (ca. 801– ca. 873), the first Arab philosopher at the fork between Islamic theology and philosophy, we find a strong doctrine of divine simplicity:

> The True One, therefore, has neither matter, form, quantity, quality, or relation, is not described by any of the remaining intelligible things, and has neither genus, specific difference, individual, property, common accident or movement; and it is not described by any of the things which are denied to be one in truth. It is, accordingly, pure and simple unity, i.e., [having] nothing other than unity, while every other one is multiple.[110]

The Neo-Platonic tendencies in the philosophy of al-Kindi come to full fruition in the metaphysical system of al-Fārābī (d. 950), who has been hailed as "the founder of Arab Neoplatonism and the first major figure in the history of that philosophical movement since Proclus"[111] and of ibn

[110] Ya'qūb ibn Isḥāq al-Kindi, *Al-Kindi's Metaphysics: A Translation of Ya'qūb ibn Isḥāq al-Kindi's Treatise "On First Philosophy,"* trans. Alfred L. Ivry (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1974), 112.
[111] Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 147.

Sīnā (980–1057), the greatest of the Arabic philosophers in the east. Ibn Sīnā follows Fārābī in drawing an ontological distinction between essence and existence, which obtains universally save in God the One, who is the source of existence of everything else: "Everything except the One who is by his essence One and Existent acquires existence from something else."[112] Any being composed of essence and existence requires a cause of the conjunction of essence and existence in that being and therefore cannot be absolutely necessary. Essence and existence cannot be distinct in God lest he be a composite being and therefore require a cause. His existence cannot be caused by his essence, for then the essence itself would have to be a complete being in order to cause the existence of another. But essence without existence is nothing and cannot, therefore, cause being. This implies that God's essence does not just involve existence; rather it *is* existence.[113] In fact, it can even be said that God in a sense has no essence but simply is pure existence.[114]

Moreover, God must be pure actuality. For God must have all perfections, since all perfections in the universe come from him. Since he is perfect, he can have no potentiality to receive anything; his perfection exists in full actuality. Further, he must be absolutely one and simple. For if his attributes were added to his essence, then the attributes would be in potentiality in respect to the essence. If his attributes were said to constitute his essence, then he would be composite and require a cause.

Islamic theologians and philosophers bequeathed the fruit of their deliberations along with the legacy of Aristotle to western Christian theologians. The medium of this transmission was Jewish thinkers, who fully participated in the intellectual life of Iberian Muslim society. Moses Maimonides (1135–1204), who stood at the high water mark of medieval Jewish philosophy, followed Fārābī and ibn Sīnā in holding God to be an absolutely simple being of pure actuality.[115] "There cannot be any belief in the unity of God except by admitting that he is one simple substance, without any composition or plurality of elements: one from whatever side you view it, and by whatever test you examine it: not divisible into two parts in any way and by any cause, nor capable of any form of plurality either objectively or subjectively."[116] In particular, in God there is no distinction between essence and existence: "But as regards a being whose existence is

[112] Ibn Sīnā, *Metaphysics* [*al-Shifā'*] 8.5; cf. 1.5.
[113] Ibn Sīnā, "On the Nature of God [from *al-Risālat al-'Arshīya*]," in *Avicenna on Theology*, by Arthur J. Arberry (London: John Murray, 1951), 25–29.
[114] Ibn Sīnā, *Metaphysics* [*al-Shifā'*] 8.4.
[115] Moses Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed* 2.1.
[116] Maimonides, 1.51.

not due to any cause – God alone is that being, for his existence, as we have said, is absolute – existence and essence are perfectly identical."[117] A champion of the *via negativa,* Maimonides maintains that we have no positive knowledge of God's essence. "I am therefore at a loss to see how they can find any similarity [between the attributes of God and those of man]: how their definitions can be identical, and their significations the same! This is a decisive proof that there is, in no way or sense, anything common to the attributes predicated of God and those used in reference to ourselves: they have only the same names, and nothing else is common to them."[118]

Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed* was translated into Latin within ten years of his death and became readily available to Latin-speaking theologians, being used in particular by Thomas Aquinas as his "guide and model" in his systematic harmonization of Aristotle and Christianity.[119] Thus, the legacy of Plotinus' doctrine of divine simplicity came to imbue medieval and, eventually, post-Reformation scholastic theology.

5.2.6 Thomas Aquinas

Historically, the doctrine of divine simplicity comes to its fullest expression in the theology of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). On the heels of his famous five ways of proving God's existence in his *Summa theologiae,* Thomas immediately turns to the question of God's simplicity, which he develops over eight articles on the basis of his theistic proofs.[120] Following ibn Sīnā and Maimonides, Aquinas argues that God is absolutely simple, nothing other than the act of being itself. Our interest at this point is not so much in the many arguments Aquinas gives in support as in the doctrine of divine simplicity that he enunciates.

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[117] Maimonides, 1.57.

[118] Maimonides, 1.56. Maimonides' denial of divine attributes was clearly aimed at a constituent ontology with respect to God: "He is not a substance to which existence is joined as an accident, as an additional element. His existence is always absolute, and has never been a new element or an accident in him" (1.57). He very provocatively affirms, "Consequently God exists without possessing the attribute of existence. Similarly he lives, without possessing the attribute of life; knows, without possessing the attribute of knowledge; is omnipotent without possessing the attribute of omnipotence; is wise, without possessing the attribute of wisdom: all this reduces itself to one and the same entity; there is no plurality in him" (1.57). He claims that "all perfections must really exist in God" (1.55), even though "He has no positive attribute whatever" (1.57). Unfortunately, Maimonides saw no way clear to ascribe univocal predicates to God truly without implying properties as divine constituents, and, hence, he retreated to his seeming agnosticism.

[119] In the words of Isaac Husik, *A History of Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1940), 306.

[120] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.3. For an exposition of his first three ways, which are fertile ground for his doctrine of divine simplicity, see my *The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz,* Library of Philosophy and Religion (London: Macmillan, 1980), chap. 5.

On the basis of his first way (the argument from motion or change), his third way (the argument from contingency), and his fourth way (the argument from degrees of value among things), Thomas first infers that God is not a physical body (Ia.3.1) These arguments are, significantly, taken to prove that God is pure actuality and in no way in potentiality.

Next, on the basis of his second way (the argument from causation), his third way, and his fourth way, Thomas infers that God is not composed of form and matter (Ia.3.2). He even goes so far as to say that God, as the first efficient cause, "is therefore of his essence a form; and not composed of matter and form."[121] But, as we shall see, there is reason not to take such an identification literally. It then follows that God is the same as his essence or nature, since beings which are pure forms, such as angels, lacking any matter to individuate their forms, are therefore each a unique instance of their respective natures (Ia.3.3).[122] Just as an angel is a concrete object, so the natures or essences spoken of here are concrete, not abstract, objects, which are ontological constituents of things.[123] In denying that God's nature is a proper constituent of God, Thomas distances himself from the Cappadocian view, which differentiates God from his nature.

Next Thomas argues that since God has been proved to be the first cause, it follows that God's essence or nature is identical with his existence (Ia.3.4). For God's existence is either (1) derived from his nature or (2) external to his nature or (3) the same as his nature. But (1) represents a self-caused being, which the second way has shown to be impossible, and (2) describes a being whose existence is caused by another, which God is not. Therefore (3), God's essence is the same as his existence.[124] This thesis, adopted from the Muslim and Jewish proponents of divine simplicity, suggests that Thomas' claim that God is a pure form, identical with his nature, is not an identity thesis but a replacement thesis such as we found

[121] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.3.2. He also says, "such a form is God."

[122] For an account see Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence* 5, where he treats the essences of immaterial substances like souls, angels, and God. Since they have no matter, the essence or quiddity of such substances is said to be their form alone. As Hughes points out, Thomas seems to have forgotten that immaterial beings could have accidental properties and so not be identical to their natures (Christopher Hughes, *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God: An Investigation in Aquinas' Philosophical Theology*, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989], 90–94).

[123] See Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence* 4, where Aquinas explains the two senses in which "nature" or "essence" is used to designate the nature, first, as it exists in the intellect as an abstraction and so a universal and, second, as it exists in this or that individual thing as a constituent to which accidents may be added to constitute the thing. In chapter 1 Aquinas explains that "essence," "quiddity," "nature," and even "form" are often used as co-referring terms with different nuances; so also *ousia* (substance) among the Greeks (2). See also Wolterstorff, "Divine Simplicity," 540–543, who helped to draw the attention of contemporary philosophers of religion to the fact that for medieval thinkers like Aquinas a nature or essence is a concrete constituent of things.

[124] This argument is more fully expounded in Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence* 5. For an exposition and a discussion of his other arguments for the same conclusion see Hughes, *Complex Theory*, 28–58.

in Augustine and Anselm. God is not literally a form but takes the place of a form, for no form is an act of being, as God is said to be. This conclusion seems confirmed when Thomas proceeds to argue that anything "which has existence but is not existence is a being by participation. . . . if, therefore, [God] is not his own existence he will be not essential but participated being."[125] Since God is the first being, he cannot have being by participation. Later Thomas will say, "since God is absolute form, or rather absolute being, he can be in no way composite."[126]

Aquinas will not even allow God to be classified according to the scheme of genus and difference (Ia.3.5). He argues on various grounds that God cannot be a species within some genus. Thomas observes that God's standing outside this classificatory schema makes it impossible to define God, for a definition is stated in terms of genus and specific difference.[127] Thus, we cannot know what God's nature or essence is. The Cappadocians could soften the impact of this agnosticism by holding that God has many essential properties in addition to his nature which are knowable by us, but Aquinas precludes such knowledge by identifying God's undefinable nature with God himself.

God, moreover, has no accidental or essential properties (Ia.3.6). What is especially striking in this article is that Aquinas denies not merely that God has contingent properties but even that he has essential properties.[128] For he rejects the view, held by the Cappadocians, that God can have essential properties which are not constitutive of his nature,[129] and since his nature is itself the pure act of being, it follows that God has no essential properties, indeed no properties at all.

Despite God's having no properties, Aquinas elsewhere affirms, paradoxically, that God does have all perfections:

> although God is existence only, this does not mean that he should lack other perfections or excellences; rather, he has all perfections of all kinds,

[125] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.3.4.

[126] Thomas Aquinas, Ia.3.7.

[127] For an account of genus and species see Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence* III.

[128] Brian Davies correctly insists that for Aquinas simplicity is therefore not an attribute or property of God, since "it explicitly denies that, in a serious sense, God has any attributes or properties" (Brian Davies, "Simplicity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Philosophical Theology,* ed. Charles Taliaferro and Chad Meister [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010], 36). Aquinas is not saying that God is something whose different attributes are actually one and the same attribute. Rather he is saying that God is not a being with distinct attributes at all (39).

[129] He explains, "neither can he have any essential accidents (as the capability of laughing is an essential accident of man), because such accidents are caused by the constituent principles of the subject. Now there can be nothing caused in God, since he is the first cause. Hence it follows that there is no accident in God" (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.3.6). In *On Being and Essence* 2, Thomas explains that whereas the essence of a thing is what its definition signifies, accidents are "something added to its essence, or as something existing outside of its essence."

> and for this reason he is said to be perfect absolutely speaking. . . . But he has all these perfections in a more excellent manner than any other thing, for in him they are one, and in others they are diverse. And the reason for this is that he has all these perfections on account of his simple existence; just as, if there were someone who on account of a simple quality could perform the operations of all qualities, then in that simple quality he would have all qualities, so too does God have all perfections in his existence itself.[130]

It might be thought that the paradox here could be resolved by adopting a non-constituent ontology, according to which God has various perfections without having the corresponding properties as ontological constituents. But on Aquinas' view God is identical to his nature, and the way in which we grasp what a thing is is by means of its falling under genus and species; the pure act of being is therefore unintelligible, despite the affirmation of its perfection.

As if to close any door left open, Aquinas argues that God is altogether simple (*Summa theologiae* Ia.3.7). This conclusion follows from the previous articles:

> For there is neither composition of quantitative parts in God, since he is not a body; nor composition of form and matter; nor does his nature differ from his *suppositum*; nor his essence from his existence; neither is there in him composition of genus and difference, nor of subject and accident. Therefore, it is clear that God is nowise composite, but is altogether simple.[131]

Aquinas adds confirming arguments from the dependence of composites on their parts, composites' need of a cause of their composition, the presence of potentiality in composites, and the fact that in every composite there is something that is not the whole itself, all of which is incompatible with God as the first being.[132] Finally, he clarifies that although God is being, he is not the generic being that enters into composition with other things but rather is their efficient and exemplaric cause (Ia.3.8).

All this raises the question whether for Aquinas God really has an essence. That is to say, is the claim that God's essence is existence an identity thesis along the lines of (OAST) or a replacement thesis along the lines of (NTDT)? Aquinas takes cognizance of this question after the close of

[130] Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence* VI. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* I.28, where he states that imperfect things are imperfect because they do not have existence according to its full power.
[131] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.3.7.
[132] See the similar arguments in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* I.18.

his discussion of God as being itself subsisting (*ipsum esse subsistens*) in *On Being and Essence* V. He writes,

> there is something, namely, God, whose essence is his own existence; and for this reason there are philosophers who say that God does not have a quiddity or essence, because his essence is not something other than his existence. And from this it follows that he is not in a genus. For everything that is in a genus has to have its essence besides its existence, since the quiddity or nature of their genus or species is not distinguished on account of the nature of those things of which these are the genus or species, but existence is diverse in the diverse things.[133]

In his earlier *Commentary on the Sentences*, Aquinas identifies these unnamed philosophers as ibn Sīnā and Maimonides.[134] It is fairly clear which passages from ibn Sīnā Aquinas had in mind. In the metaphysical treatises of his *al-Shifā'*, ibn Sīnā says that "The First has no quiddity other than his individual existence" and that "there is no quiddity for the Necessary Existent other than its being the Necessary Existent. And this is [the thing's] 'thatness,' [its individual existence]."[135] Whereas "The rest of the things, other than the Necessary Existent, have quiddities," "The First . . . has no quiddity. . . . He is pure existence. . . ."[136] Moreover, "The First also has no genus. This is because the First has no quiddity. That which has no quiddity has no genus, since genus is spoken of in answer to the question, 'What is it?' and [moreover] genus in one respect is a part of a thing; and it has been ascertained that the First is not a composite."[137] It follows that "Since he has neither genus nor differentia, he has no definition."[138]

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[133] Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence* VI. The point of the last sentence seems to be that since different things can belong to the same genus and species, what distinguishes them from one another is their different acts of being (which are, in turn, the result of the parcels of matter that their natures actualize).

[134] Aquinas notes, "For some, like Avicenna (*De intellig.* chap. 1) and Rabbi Moses (*Guide for the Perplexed* I.7,8), say that the thing that God is, is some subsisting *esse*, and that in God there is nothing other than *esse*; hence they say that he is *esse* without an essence [*esse sine essentia*]" (Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences* I.2)

[135] Ibn Sīnā, *Metaphysics* [*al-Shifā'*] 8.4.1; 8.4.9. The word translated "individual existence" or "thatness" by Michael Marmura is *inniyya*, which, as Jon McGinnis explains, means literally, "the-that-it-is-ness." It is in contrast to whatness or quiddity. "Avicenna identifies God's thatness with being that which exists necessarily through itself" (Jon McGinnis to William Lane Craig, June 17, 2021).

[136] Ibn Sīnā, *Metaphysics* [*al-Shifā'*] 8.4.12–13.

[137] Ibn Sīnā, 8.4.14.

[138] Ibn Sīnā, 8.4.16. It might seems odd that despite his denial that God has a quiddity ibn Sīnā will say things like "The One, insofar as he is the Necessary Existent, is what he is in terms of himself – namely, his essence" (Ibn Sīnā, 8.5.1). But McGinnis cautions, "One thing to note about both Marmura's and the Latin translations, they both render the Arabic *dhāt* as 'essence' or 'essentia' respectively, and so can give the sense that God has an essence. The Arabic is better rendered 'self,' 'that very one' or 'entity'. Thus, translations like, "He is one in essence" or "He is as such in his essence" are better understood as "in himself, he is one" or "He is such in himself" (McGinnis to Craig).

On the other hand, Maimonides did not seem to hold to the view ascribed to him by Aquinas. R. C. Taylor emphasizes that Aquinas tends to read Maimonides through the lenses of ibn Sīnā and so attributes to the rabbi the same view.[139] In fact, in his *Guide for the Perplexed* Maimonides gives no indication that he denies that God does have an essence that just is his existence. He speaks freely of God's essence:

> as regards a being whose existence is not due to any cause – God alone is that being, for his existence, as we have said, is absolute – existence and essence are perfectly identical. . . . We further notice, that the existence, that is the essence, of this Being is not limited to its own existence: many existences emanate from it. . . . What, then, can be the result of our efforts, when we try to obtain a knowledge of a Being that is free from substance, that is most simple, whose existence is absolute, and not due to any cause, to whose perfect essence nothing can be superadded? . . . In the contemplation of his essence, our comprehension and knowledge prove insufficient. . . .[140]

What Maimonides was constrained to deny was any plurality at all in God's essence.[141] So he says, "He is a simple essence, without any additional element whatever."[142]

Intriguingly, in *On Being and Essence* Aquinas remains non-committal on the question of whether God has an essence, passing on to the next point.[143] But he agrees, as we have seen, that God transcends the classification of genus and species and that anything falling under genus and species must be composed of essence and existence. He seems willing to accede

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[139] Richard C. Taylor, "Maimonides and Aquinas on Divine Attributes: The Importance of Avicenna," in *Maimonides' "Guide of the Perplexed" in Translation: A History from the Thirteenth Century to the Twentieth,* ed. Josef Stern, James T. Robinson, and Yonatan Shemesh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 333–363. Maimonides does not deny that God has an essence but claims that the divine essence is beyond creaturely description except through negation or causality, neither of which yields a positive characterization of the divine essence.

[140] Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed* I.57.

[141] He writes:

> "If, however, you have a desire . . . truly to hold the conviction that God is One and possesses true unity, without admitting plurality or divisibility in any sense whatever, you must understand that God has no essential attribute in any form or in any sense whatever, and that the rejection of corporeality implies the rejection of essential attributes. Those who believe that God is One, and that he has many attributes, declare the unity with their lips, and assume plurality in their thoughts" (Maimonides, I.50).

[142] Maimonides, I.53.

[143] He continues, "Nevertheless, if we say that God is existence only [*esse tantum*], we still do not have to fall into the error of those who stated that God is that universal existence whereby each and every thing formally exists." He is no longer talking about the Muslim or Jewish philosophers but the French Almaricians, followers of Amalric of Bena, a professor at the University of Paris.

to the claim that God is *esse* alone (*esse tantum*). In his *Commentary on the Sentences* I.2.1.3, the question at issue is not whether God is existence without an essence but whether the diversity of divine attributes is merely conceptual or has a foundation in God himself. Aquinas opts for the view that while the diversity of the divine attributes is merely conceptual, the perfections have nonetheless a foundation in the divine being. Unable to grasp the simple divine being, we form separate and inadequate conceptions of God's simple perfection.

Eleonore Stump muses that one problem with the replacement thesis is that if God is *esse* alone, then, despite Aquinas' insistence that we are unable to know the *quid est* of God because of God's simplicity, we do know the *quid est* or essence of God, for we know that God is *esse*, and we know something about the nature of *esse*.[144] Stump's worry seems misconceived. As she herself explains, "*quid est*" is a technical term of medieval logic having to do with the genus or species of a thing.[145] The proof from his effects that God is *esse* tells us nothing about God's genus and species;[146] indeed, he cannot be classified, and so we have no knowledge of his *quid est*. On the replacement thesis God has no *quid est*, and so we have no knowledge of his essence, just as Aquinas says. In any case, since on the identity thesis God's essence is existence, Stump's same objection applies: we would have a good knowledge of God's essence if it were the same as his existence, which Aquinas denies. The objection thus backfires.

In his *Summa contra Gentiles* Aquinas vacillates between (NTDT) and (OAST) as ways of expressing God's simplicity: "His essence or quiddity is not something other than just being. . . . God, therefore, does not have an essence that is not his being. . . . God's being must, therefore, be his quiddity. . . . God's essence, therefore, is not something other than his being. . . . God's being is his essence. . . . His essence is, therefore,

[144] Eleonore Stump, "Simplicity and Aquinas's Quantum Metaphysics," in *Die Metaphysik des Aristoteles im Mittelalter: Rezeption und Transformation*, ed. Gerhard Krieger (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 200. In an earlier piece Stump is ambivalent about the replacement/identity thesis, remarking: "God is so radically one that there is no composition in him even of essence and existence. Consequently, God does not have an essence: instead, he is identical with his essence, and even his existence cannot be distinguished from that essence" (Eleonore Stump, "Simplicity," in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro [Oxford: Blackwell, 1997], 251). This statement draws Graham Oppy's riposte: "This is surely incoherent: on the one hand, we are told that God has no essence; on the other hand, we are told that God's essence – the thing whose existence has just been denied! – is identical to God's existence. This pattern – of claiming to identify things which one elsewhere says do not exist – is characteristic of much of the literature on divine simplicity" (Graham Oppy, "The Devilish Complexities of Divine Simplicity," *Philo* 6, no. 1 [2003]: 22).

[145] Stump, "Aquinas's Quantum Metaphysics," 197.

[146] "From this it is also plain that he has no genus nor difference, nor can there be any definition of him; nor, save through his effects, a demonstration of him" (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.3.5).

His being."[147] Given his failure clearly to endorse ibn Sīnā's view, it seems best to think that Aquinas followed Maimonides in affirming the strict identity of God's essence and existence. But there are reasons to think that he should have followed ibn Sīnā in affirming that God just is *ipsum esse subsistens* without an essence. First, God's being is unrestricted by any essence but is the pure act of being subsisting. Second, essences or natures place a thing in its genus and species, but God cannot be so classified. Third, if God had an essence, then he should be definable, but God cannot be defined. Fourth, if God had an essence, it would be a pure form, but no form is an act of existence. Be that as it may, if God's essence is literally one and the same thing as his being, we have no idea what that essence is, since the act of being is not conceivable by us.

With Aquinas we have reached the highwater mark in the history of the development of the doctrine of divine simplicity. With all the best will in the world, we must admit that the treatments of the doctrine by Post-Reformation Protestant scholastics are but pale copies of Thomism. Only with the renaissance of Christian philosophy in our day have more sophisticated treatments of divine simplicity come to light. Let us therefore now turn to some evaluation of what we have learned.

5.3 Arguments for Divine Simplicity

Let us first consider arguments in support of divine simplicity in the strong sense of (DS+). Given the want of scriptural support of the doctrine, it is perfect being theology which must bear the weight of justifying (DS+). Historically, the doctrine has been taken to be an implication of divine perfection and aseity. But today there seems to be a consensus that the traditional arguments offered in defense of this implication are extraordinarily weak or, perhaps, go to justify only a weak understanding of the doctrine akin to (DS). Today even the proponents of (DS+) typically assume a defensive posture, arguing that the doctrine has not been shown to be implausible or, at least, incoherent.

5.3.1 Arguments from Divine Perfection

Arguments that divine simplicity follows from God's perfection are remarkably weak. For example, reflecting Greek influence, it was widely assumed that anything simpler is thereby more perfect, so that a being of maximum

[147] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* Ia.22.

perfection must be absolutely simple. Little comment is necessary, for the argument is clearly question-begging without some reason for the assumption that to be simpler is to be better. On the contrary, a being that has a rich variety of superlative properties such as are ascribed to God is clearly greater than one lacking any such properties. Aquinas does argue that a composite being will have parts that are less perfect than the whole, but even conceding the point that, say, omnipotence alone is not as great as God, we have been given no reason to think that the parts of a maximally great being must be as great as the whole.

It has traditionally been argued that a perfect being cannot have any passive potentiality but must be fully actual and therefore immutable. This argument is counter-intuitive and, as we shall see, has theologically unacceptable implications. In the hands of advocates of divine simplicity, it entails that God lacks, not only any Aristotelian ability to change intrinsically, but, more radically, even the capacity to be different than he is. It is enough for now to observe that a being who has infinite resources of untapped potential is plausibly greater than a being whose power is exhausted by the creation of the finite world. What God has actually created could not possibly represent the full range of his power. The ability to create an indefinite number of different universes is obviously a great-making property which must therefore be ascribed to God. That God might change in actualizing some heretofore untapped potentiality in no way threatens his greatness, for change obviously does not entail a change for the worse (or the better) but may take place on the same level, so to speak.

Aquinas claims that if God moves from potentiality to actuality in any respect, then there must be some external cause of that change in God, which is impossible. There is no reason to agree with Aquinas that the cause of the change cannot be God himself, freely choosing to actualize a potentiality. It is futile to object, as Thomas does, that God cannot be a self-caused being, for that stricture concerns God's existence: he cannot bring himself into being. Only by assuming that God is his existence, which begs the question, can one deny to God the freedom to actualize his own potentialities. Moreover, having potentiality need not entail mutability. An immutable God has the potential to create different worlds. For example, God has the potentiality to have different foreknowledge of future contingents, even if it is impossible that his foreknowledge of the future change. If it is rejoined that God's potentiality with respect to creating has been fully actualized by what he has done, so that no change is possible, it still remains the case that God is possibly different than he actually is and so must have contingent features to his being. That God would be different in

different worlds, say, knowing that different creatures exist, subverts (DS+) but is untroubling, so long as he remains essentially the same.

5.3.2 Arguments from Divine Aseity

The claim that divine simplicity follows from God's aseity is also unjustified. The principal arguments that divine aseity implies God's simplicity attempt to show that composition is for one reason or another incompatible with divine aseity.[148] For example, it has been traditionally said that if God is composed, then God is dissoluble, if not physically then metaphysically, into his constituent parts, so that he could cease to exist. This argument is weak, for it assumes without justification that God is not composed of metaphysically inseparable parts, so that God has the property of indivisibility along with his other perfections.[149] A circle, for example, might have a certain circumference, a certain diameter, and a certain area, which, though distinct, are metaphysically inseparable properties. To be at all plausible, the argument must take "composed" to mean something like "assembled" or "constructed" out of parts, which no orthodox believer would affirm of God.[150]

It has also been argued that if God were composite, then there must exist a cause of the composition of his parts, in contradiction to the doctrine

[148] Hughes calls these "arguments from the nature of composites" and discusses five such arguments, none of which, he argues, is cogent (Hughes, *Complex Theory*, 28, 30–41; cf. Hughes, "Divine Simplicity," 8–13). The fifth argument, which is axiological, I mentioned under arguments from perfection. Hughes shows that Aquinas' additional arguments in support of divine simplicity ultimately reduce to his arguments from the nature of composition. These latter arguments, Hughes points out, involve three assertions: (a) if God's essence is distinct from his existence, then God is composite; (b) if anything is composite, it has the features specified; and (c) God could not have any of those features. Hughes notes that one might want to take issue with (a) on the grounds that it is confused to think of existence as in any way a part or constituent of an existent individual. Hughes, however, is willing to waive (a) because (b) and (c) are unconvincing. Arguments from the nature of composites fail, he thinks, because they do not show that a composite being must have properties incompatible with being God. Be that as it may, it seems to me that (a), which can be applied as well to other alleged metaphysical constituents besides essence and existence, is of central importance and should not be ignored. In challenging (a), one need not even go so far as to call such a constituent ontology confused so much as unjustified.

[149] Thus, a baffled Oppy muses that "Even if there are 'distinctions in God' or 'distinctions in God's nature,' it is far from obvious that it follows that God 'faces the possibility of destruction through decomposition.'. . . since the idea, that there can be internal or necessary relations between properties, is such a familiar one, there is some reason . . . for suspecting that we still have not arrived at a satisfactory characterisation of the doctrine of divine simplicity" (Oppy, "Divine Simplicity," 11). Hughes points out that, ironically, there are even good Thomistic reasons to deny that every composite is potentially dissoluble. Angels and celestial bodies, for example, cannot undergo dissolution, since they have no susceptibility to generation and corruption, despite their being composed of substance and accidents and, in the latter case, even form and matter (Hughes, *Complex Theory*, 37; cf. 34–35, 90–93).

[150] See Burns, "Divine Simplicity," 271–293, who thinks that Thomas' central argument for divine simplicity is guilty of equivocation: the direct opposite of "simple" is "complex," not "composed," and it is by no means self-evident that every complex must literally be a composite, much less caused. Thomas' arguments are based on the "spuriously 'self-evident' assumption which he had inherited from the Arab philosophers that every plurality must be composed" (292).

of divine aseity. This argument, too, is weak. If God were assembled out of parts, then plausibly there must be a cause of the conjunction of his parts, but no one imagines such a thing. To be at all plausible, the argument must assume that God's co-eternal parts are more fundamental than God. But there is no reason for such an assumption. God and his parts could be on an ontological par and metaphysically inseparable. Moreover, medievals themselves were familiar with wholes that are explanatorily or metaphysically prior to any parts one cares to specify in them, such as in cases of an object's potential infinite divisibility. If the whole is metaphysically prior to its parts, then possessing such parts does not clearly require a cause of their conjunction.[151] In his *Incoherence of the Philosophers* al-Ghazālī (1058–1111) argued this point forcefully against the Islamic philosophers of his day, maintaining that no good arguments had been given to show that God, as the First Principle, could not have an essence comprising a plurality of attributes.[152]

On the contemporary scene, similar considerations have led to widespread scepticism about the so-called Doctrine of Arbitrary Undetached Parts, which states that if a region of space is occupied by a material object, then the material content of *any* sub-region of that space also constitutes a material object.[153] This doctrine would imply that the matter comprising my big toe, the right side of my torso, and a strip in between is a material object. Van Inwagen argues persuasively that the doctrine leads to absurd consequences.[154] Although his argument is not immediately applicable to

[151] Duby takes cognizance of Burns' claim that God's parts need not be thought to be ontologically prior to God himself, replying, "to posit such a necessary structure is to diminish the primacy and ultimacy of God and to reassign these to a blind state of affairs that would stand behind him and behind all reality. Indeed, this would be to subsume God under a higher ontological structure under which he and the creature both would fall at the expense of not only his primacy and ultimacy but also his uniqueness and particularity" (Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 130–131; cf. 148). This reply is misconceived, for it is precisely Burns' point that God's primacy and ultimacy vis à vis his parts make the question of a cause of his composition nugatory.

[152] Al-Ghazālī, *Incoherence of the Philosophers* [*Tahāfut al-falāsifah*] VI. For an exposition of Ghazālī's criticisms see Jon McGinnis, "Simple Is as Simple Does: Plantinga and Ghazālī on Divine Simplicity," *Religious Studies* 58, no. S1 (2022): S97–S109.

[153] See Peter Van Inwagen, "The Doctrine of Arbitrary Undetached Parts," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (1981): 123–137.

[154] He argues as follows: imagine some object which has an undetached part not vital to its continued existence (for example, me and one of my kidneys). According to the Doctrine of Arbitrary Undetached Parts, there exists in this case another object in addition to myself which is comprised of me minus my kidney. Now the whole object is obviously not identical to the supposed object which is the whole object minus the part. For the whole object and this diminished object lacking the part do not have exactly the same size or constituents. Suppose, then, that the whole object actually loses the part (I donate one kidney for transplantation). Since the part is not essential to the object's continued existence, the object still exists after losing the part. (I survive the operation.) But now the original object *is* identical to the diminished object. But this scenario violates the Principle of the Transitivity of Identity: If $x = y = z$, then $x = z$. The best way out of this muddle, Van Inwagen advises, is to deny the Doctrine of Arbitrary Undetached Parts. Before the object loses its part, there just is no such object as the diminished object. There is the whole object, and the alleged diminished object is a figment of the imagination.

God, it calls into question the assumption that arbitrary undetached parts of an object are themselves objects and therefore in need of a cause of their conjunction. For example, since a fundamental particle like an electron is physically simple, even though we can conceptually distinguish its right half from its left half, there is no cause of the conjunction of its right half and its left half. This fact suggests that we may distinguish between conceptual parts, which are mind-dependent aspects of objects, and ontological parts, which are mind-independent constituents of objects.[155] So any two halves of the electron, whether right and left, upper and lower, front and back, are, as the medievals would put it, conceptually distinct with a foundation in reality (there is a *distinctio rationis cum fundamentum in rei*). For the electron really is an extended object in which identifiable subregions are occupied by material contents, but that occupying matter does not constitute in any case a genuine object. The medievals were willing to allow such conceptual distinctions in God, for these were not real (not a *distinctio realis*);[156] but unfortunately the medievals' constituent ontologies prevented them from seeing distinctions such as substance and accident, a thing and its nature, essence and existence as merely conceptual rather than real. Ironically, then, although contemporary defenders of divine simplicity insist on assessing the doctrine within the medieval metaphysical framework, it was precisely that framework which occasioned the problems to begin with.

Take, for example, the central distinction between essence and existence. What Aristotle took to be a conceptual distinction was transformed by the Arabic philosophers and Aquinas into a metaphysical distinction. It is only

[155] See Markosian, "Simples," 13–14. Markosian calls ontological parts metaphysical parts, but I prefer to distinguish ontological parts which are physical parts from ontological parts which are metaphysical parts like natures, properties, forms, essences, etc.

[156] For example, Scotus drew a merely formal distinction (*distinctio formalis a parte rei*) between God's intellect and will, which are not really distinct. Sometimes Scotus is interpreted to mean that such relata are ontological parts of God but are inseparable parts, an interpretation which subverts a strong doctrine of divine simplicity. Richard Muller misleads in characterizing a *distinctio realis* as "a real distinction, such as exists between two independent things" (Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theol*ogy [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985], 93), so that "the term 'real' is related to the thing with the result that real does not mean genuine but rather substantial" (Muller, *Divine Essence and Attributes*, 56; cf. "A distinction made *realiter* invariably indicates a distinction such as obtains between things and other things or between a thing taken as a whole and its removable parts" [287]). This interpretation is belied by the real distinction between essence and existence, which does not fit his characterization. It seems that the best synonym for a "real" distinction is an "ontological" distinction. So Muller unfairly indicts Wolterstorff and Plantinga for thinking that divine simplicity indicated "the utter absence of distinctions to a majority of the theologians in the patristic, medieval, and post-reformation eras," for these theologians held that while "the divine attributes are essentially identical," they also held that "they are distinct in another sense, namely, formally, rationally, virtually, or eminently" (. 57). The problem is, none of these distinctions is ontological. See further Jeffrey Brower, "Medieval Theories of Relations," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Winter 2018 Edition), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/relations-medieval.

on the basis of that real distinction that Thomas' causal argument for a primal being not so composed that is the cause of the conjunction of essence and existence in any finite being has any bite. Contemporary Thomists recognize and celebrate Thomas' transformation of Aristotle's conceptual distinction into the so-called real distinction between essence and existence. But they also recognize that Thomas nowhere tries to justify such a real distinction.[157] His arguments from motion, causality, and contingency go at best to establish that finite beings exist contingently and depend for their existence upon a metaphysically necessary being. But that requires neither that finite beings are metaphysically composed of essence and existence nor that a metaphysically necessary being is the pure act of existence subsisting. Indeed, as we shall see, that inference leads to an unintelligible conclusion. In short, one might affirm that God possesses parts but not fundamental parts, and so no cause of their conjunction is required.

It has also been argued, for example, by Anselm, that anything composed of parts is dependent upon its parts for its existence, which is incompatible with divine aseity: "everything composite needs for its existence the parts of which it is composed; and what it is it owes to its parts. For through them it is whatever it is; whereas what they are they are not through it; and so it is not at all supreme."[158] In a careful analysis of Anselm's argument, Thomas Morris points out the central failing of Anselm's reasoning. While it is true that

A. If God's attributes did not exist, God would not exist,

it is also true that

B. If God did not exist, God's attributes would not exist.

This sort of counterfactual dependence is of no ontological significance. Morris observes, "All that we have seen is apparently that between God and

[157] Dolezal comments, "Thomas does not attempt to prove the real distinction between essence and existence in creatures, but instead simply presupposes it as background to his exposition of the divine essence as identical with the divine existence" (Dolezal, *God without Parts*, 99). Dolezal rehearses several arguments on behalf of a real distinction, but these seem to be question-begging. For example, David Oderberg is quoted as arguing, "In the case of existence in respect of contingent things, . . . I do not misconceive any such thing if I exclude existence from it. Hence existence cannot be of the essence of contingent things" (100). The argument just assumes that contingent things have essences as ontological constituents. Why not adopt a conception of essences that does not construe them to be ontological constituents of things? Similarly John Wippel's argument that "If he [Thomas] has successfully shown that it is impossible for there to be more than one being in which essence and existence are identical, then he can conclude to the factual otherness of essence and existence in all other entities" (102) just takes it as given that essences are metaphysical constituents of things.

[158] Anselm, *Monologion* 17.

any metaphysically distinct property exemplified by him, a mutual *logical* dependency will exist, which consists in nothing more than the mutuality of the necessity of the relata on each side of the relation."[159] Anselm's concern about divine dependence was thus quite misplaced.

Morris goes on to argue that ontologically, any dependence relation is asymmetrical: God's attributes depend on God. He says, "If there is any substantive sense in which God depends on his properties, it will also be true that his properties depend, and depend in a deeper ontological sense, on him. Thus God will never be on the receiving end only, so to speak, of an ontological dependence relation."[160] Morris and Christopher Menzel's attempt to defend God's creating his own nature by appealing to a similar distinction between logical and ontological dependence got them into bootstrapping difficulties.[161] But here no such creative account is contemplated. The point rather is that God is not composed of more fundamental parts. If God is composed of parts, God as a whole is ontologically prior to his parts.

So traditional attempts to show that divine aseity implies divine simplicity are pretty unimpressive. The fact of the matter is that one can offer, as we have, a robust defense of divine aseity without implying theses like (NTDT) and (OAST) and thus embracing a strong doctrine of divine simplicity. As I have repeatedly intimated, we may refuse constituent ontologies such as were assumed by the traditional proponents of divine simplicity as part of their metaphysical framework. Peter van Inwagen has sharply challenged such constituent ontologies, denying that concrete particulars possesses any ontological structure.[162] The reason for van Inwagen's skepticism is that he cannot make sense of constituent ontologies. "I do not understand the words and phrases that are the typical items of the core vocabulary of any given constituent ontology. 'Immanent universal', 'trope', 'exist wholly in', 'wholly present wherever it is instantiated,' 'constituent of' (said of a universal and a particular in that order): these are all mysteries to me."[163]

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[159] Thomas V. Morris, "Dependence and Divine Simplicity," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 23, no. 3 (1988): 164.

[160] Morris, "Dependence and Divine Simplicity," 171.

[161] Thomas V. Morris and Christopher Menzel, "Absolute Creation," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (1986): 353–362. For discussion of the bootstrapping problem see my *God and Abstract Objects,* chap. 4.

[162] He also makes it clear that neither do abstract objects have an ontological structure (Peter van Inwagen, "Dispensing with Ontological Levels: An Illustration," LanCog Lectures in Metaphysics 2013, *Disputatio* 6, no. 38 [2014]: 41–42).

[163] Peter van Inwagen, "Relational vs. Constituent Ontologies," *Philosophical Perspectives* 25 (2011): 393. Moreland agrees, "it is entirely unclear how a property can be a constituent of a particular (e.g. a concrete particular, a moment, or an event) without doing so by way of exemplification. Throughout history, the overwhelming majority of realists have agreed that *qua* universals, properties are the sorts of things that enter other things by way of the nexus of exemplification. . . ." (J. P. Moreland, *Universals*, Central Problems of Philosophy [Chesham, England: Acumen, 2001], 126). Cf. Devitt's complaint that on D. M. Armstrong's

He therefore denies that properties are ontological constituents of things. He says, "abstract objects. . . can in no possible sense of the word be constituents of concrete objects. Thus, the Favored Ontology agrees with 'austere nominalism' on one important point: concrete objects have no 'ontological structure.'"[164]

Van Inwagen confesses that "I'd really *like* to be an austere nominalist," but he finds himself reluctantly committed to the reality of properties by ineliminable quantification over abstract objects in our discourse.[165] In other words, van Inwagen accepts a Quinean criterion of ontological commitment, such as we have seen good reason to challenge, that obliges him to accept Platonism in spite of himself.[166] Not that such *abstracta* are doing any metaphysical work for van Inwagen; rather properties, numbers, and the rest of the Platonic horde serve merely as the referents of certain reifying expressions like "the number 7" or "the property of wisdom."[167]

Now we have already seen that a biblically adequate doctrine of divine aseity must reject such a Platonistic relational ontology, according to which God's properties are uncreated abstract objects. Moreover, there is a powerful philosophico-theological argument against the existence of uncreated, Platonic properties.[168] Consider the cluster of divine attributes which go to make up God's nature. Call that nature *deity*. On Platonism *deity* is an abstract object existing independently of God to which God stands in the relation of exemplification or instantiation. Moreover, it is in virtue of standing in relation to this object that God is divine. He is God because he exemplifies *deity*. Thus, on Platonism God does not really exist *a se* at all. For God depends upon this abstract object for his existence. Platonism does

immanent realism, we have not the "remotest idea" what "in" or "have" mean (Michael Devitt, "'Ostrich Nominalism' or 'Mirage Realism'?," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 61, no. 4 [1980]: 438). This situation has led van Inwagen to confess flatly, "I do not understand this idea" (Peter van Inwagen, "God and Other Uncreated Things," in *Metaphysics and God: Essays in Honor of Eleonore Stump*, ed. Kevin Timpe [London: Routledge, 2009], 9).

[164] Van Inwagen, "Dispensing with Ontological Levels," 33.

[165] Van Inwagen, "Relational vs. Constituent Ontologies," 400; cf. van Inwagen, "Uncreated Things," 19.

[166] See *supra*, 76. Van Inwagen's argument for properties is a sort of neo-Quinean indispensability argument. See Peter van Inwagen, "A Theory of Properties," in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, ed. Dean W. Zimmerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1: 113–115; cf. Peter van Inwagen and William Lane Craig, *Do Numbers Exist? A Debate about Abstract Objects,* ed. Tyron Goldschmidt (New York: Routledge, 2024).

[167] On van Inwagen's view properties are metaphysically idle, serving to explain neither why objects are the way they are nor their resemblance to one another. Van Inwagen is mystified by the exemplification relation. He asks, "How does a concrete object (like a green ball) reach out and take hold of a property (like the color green), an abstract object, and make it *had* or *exemplified* or *instantiated*?" (Van Inwagen, "Relational vs. Constituent Ontologies," 396). He insists, "I do believe that there is an object I call 'the color green.' . . . But I should never want to say that the fact that greenness was a property of both the apple and the book explained the fact that they were both green or the fact that they were both of the same color" (398). He therefore characterizes himself as "an ostrich Platonist," who thinks that there is here nothing to be explained.

[168] See Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 234.

not simply postulate some object existing independently of God – a serious enough compromise of God's sole ultimacy – but makes God dependent upon this object, thus denying divine aseity. The implication? "So deity/the Platonic realm, not God, is the ultimate reality."[169]

Worse, if possible: since aseity, like omnipotence, is one of the essential attributes of God included in *deity*, it turns out that God does not exemplify *deity* after all. Since aseity is essential to *deity* and God, on Platonism, does not exist *a se*, it turns out that God does not exist. On Platonism there may be a demiurge, such as is featured in Plato's *Timaeus*, but the God of orthodox theism does not exist. Theism is thus undone by Platonism. Therefore, patristic and medieval thinkers were fully justified in their rejection of Platonism and a relational ontology.[170]

Too many proponents of divine simplicity therefore conclude that we must by default embrace a constituent ontology, just as the medievals did.[171] This inference is a *non sequitur* based on the assumption that these two alternatives are jointly exhaustive. But they are not. As we have argued, we may reject both in favor of an anti-realist alternative, according to which property talk is a useful and perhaps indispensable *façon de parler*, meaningful within a certain linguistic framework but without ontological commitment.[172] We make-believe that there are such things as properties in talking, for example, about God's perfections.

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[169] Leftow, 235. Leftow offers a second argument as well for this conclusion. See also Leftow, "Is God an Abstract Object?," *Noûs* 24 (1990): 581–598, where he presents a bootstrapping objection against God's creating his own nature, which, barring divine simplicity, leaves God dependent upon his nature for his existence.

[170] In his "Opening Statement" to our *Do Numbers Exist?*, van Inwagen would avoid such untoward consequences on the grounds that according to his idiosyncratic version of Platonism, properties explain nothing. He denies what he calls the Explanatory Principle, according to which, for example, if Socrates is wise, he is wise because he has wisdom. Van Inwagen would say the reverse: Socrates has wisdom because he is wise. The property of *wisdom* does indeed exist as an uncreated abstract object, but it does not play any explanatory role. Unfortunately, it remains very obscure what it means to "have" a property, since for van Inwagen "have" is just a less "highfalutin" way of saying "exemplify" or "instantiate." How can such a relation obtain without explanatory priority on the part of the entity which is exemplified or instantiated? How does being wise put one into contact with an abstract object? When van Inwagen says things like "It is in virtue of God's being divine that *that it is divine* is true of God" and "*That it is divine* is true of God because God is God (that is, because God is divine)," it sounds as though he is saying that the truthmaker of the predication "God is divine" is, in the first case, the state of affairs of *God's being divine* and, in the second case, the fact that *God is divine*. In any case, in denying any explanatory role to properties van Inwagen has already taken a significant step in the direction of anti-realism and ought to complete the journey by shedding his Quinean criterion of ontological commitment.

[171] An exception would be Paul R. Hinlicky, *Divine Simplicity: Christ the Crisis of Metaphysics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2016), who advocates a "weak" version of divine simplicity which appeals to "nominalism" to deny that "essences are anything real except as concepts useful to humans for navigation in the flux of becoming" (xix, 69). He notes that Stephen Holmes and Colin Gunton have adopted a similar perspective (Hinlicky, 15–16).

[172] Oppy reminds us, "The doctrine of divine simplicity belongs to a philosophical theory that greatly predates the linguistic turn and the consequent deflationary approach to metaphysics, and that supposes that basic metaphysical categories must be mirrored in the surface syntax of canonical notation"

Such anti-realism about properties needs to be sharply distinguished from certain forms of theological nominalism. Nominalists are often said to have posited a mere *distinctio rationis* between God's attributes, implying, in effect, that predications concerning God's attributes are devoid of factual content and in that sense meaningless.[173] By contrast, the anti-realist allows a *distinctio rationis cum fundamentum in rei* with respect to the properties ascribed to any thing. Just as a dog which reflects a certain portion of the light spectrum can be truly said to have the property of *being brown* or an elephant which can reach the leaves up in the tree to have the property of *being big*, so God, who never began to exist and will never cease to exist, can be truly said to have the property of *being eternal,* or who sent his Son into the world for the sake of undeserving sinners, can be truly said to have the property of *being loving*. The anti-realist's point is that, absent a neo-Quinean criterion of ontological commitment, such true predications are not ontologically committing to properties for him who asserts them.[174] Thus, on an anti-realist perspective on properties, God is, indeed, not composed of metaphysical parts and is in that sense simple, but then so is everything else, even things that do have physical parts.[175]

(Oppy, "Divine Simplicity," 17). However, "we must not suppose that when we say something that is literally true of God, that [*sic*] we can read off the ontological structure of that which makes the sentence true from the surface syntactic form of the sentence in question." Indeed, "Attempts to discuss the doctrine while also making using of pleonastic conceptions of properties, objects, states of affairs, and the like, seem to me to be bound to end in disaster."

[173] Compare the view of the old-line verificationists (see this *Systematic Philosophical Theology,* vol. I, *Prolegomena*, 3–5). For theological nominalists such predications make no factual assertions.

[174] Recall Maimonides' paradoxical affirmations that God "lives, without possessing the attribute of life; knows, without possessing the attribute of knowledge; is omnipotent without possessing the attribute of omnipotence; is wise, without possessing the attribute of wisdom" (*Guide for the Perplexed* 1.57). Hughes reflects, "If. . . we think that properties are not constituents of individuals. . . , a plurality of divine attributes will not entail any form of composition within God. . . . It will no longer be true of God *alone* that he lacks composition of subject and attribute. . . . This line involves saving some of Aquinas' conception of divine simplicity at the cost of sacrificing his conception of properties as constituents of their subjects" (Hughes, *Complex Theory*, 84). So "Unlike Aquinas, we might suppose that whenever 'is *F*' was a predicate satisfied by both God and creatures. . . , 'God is *F*' was true not by virtue of God's having a constituent attribute of *F*-ness" (85; cf. 240). See also Leftow, "Divine Simplicity," 377–379, who argues that the anti-realist can embrace an Augustinian doctrine of divine simplicity without forms.

[175] By contrast, Donald W. Mertz, *Essays on Realist Instance Ontology and its Logic* (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2006), chap. 3, defends the view that aspects of a thing which are conceptually distinguished from one another may be constituents of what he calls "composite simples" or "continuous composites," entities which "can have an internal non-identity/distinctness of multiple constituents yet among which there is no numerical differentiation/discreteness as they jointly constitute the whole" (81). This strikes me as incoherent, for what does "multiple" mean if not numerically discrete? Mertz explains that in a continuous whole the constituents emerge as differentiated/discrete from the whole as the result of external abstraction. The unity of a continuous composite is a function of the containing whole relative to which the parts are virtual until differentiated externally by abstraction. Mertz takes God as the coalescence of the divine attributes to be an example of such a whole, as the divine attributes are differentiated only in the intellect. By contrast the nominalist holds "that it is possible to make a cognitive distinction differentiating the particularity and qualitative content of a particular *x* and yet this differentiation of aspects corresponds to no distinction intrinsic to *x*" (92). To my mind the latter position is far more plausible and parsimonious.

So against the theological nominalist we may truly assert that God is essentially self-existent, eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, morally perfect, and so on with respect to all the rest of the perfections ascribed to God in perfect being theology but without being ontologically committed to an object like God's essence that is an ontological constituent of God. Nether are we committed by such true predications to objects like aseity, eternity, omniscience, and so on, as parts of God. The anti-realist may thus endorse (DS) without endorsing (OAST) and thus (DS+).

An anti-realist perspective on properties connects nicely with contemporary appeals to so-called truthmaker theory in defense of divine simplicity. Briefly by way of background,[176] during the realist revival in the early years of the twentieth century various philosophers turned their attention to the question of the ontology of truth. Logical Atomists such as Russell and Wittgenstein thought that in addition to truth-bearers, whether these be sentences, thoughts, propositions, or what have you, there must also be entities in virtue of which such sentences and/or propositions are true. Various labels were given to these entities, such as "facts" or "states of affairs." Among contemporary philosophers they have come to be known as "truthmakers."

A truthmaker is typically defined as *that in virtue of which a sentence and/or a proposition is true*. According to Peter Simons, "Truth-maker theory accepts the role of something which makes a proposition true, that is, whose existence suffices for the proposition to be true. But it does not automatically pronounce on the ontological category of the truth-maker."[177] "Indeed," he insists, "*anything whatever* is a truth-maker."[178] But historically the orthodox view has identified truthmakers with such abstract realities as facts or states of affairs – more often than not, the fact stated as a sentence's truth condition, as disclosed by the disquotation principle. For the relation of a truthmaker to the relevant truth-bearer is normally taken to be one of entailment. Thus, an entity *a* makes a proposition *p* true if and only

[176] See the seminal article by Kevin Mulligan, Peter Simons, and Barry Smith, "Truth-Makers," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 44, no. 3 (1984): 287–321. An informative survey of the historical background of truthmaker theory may be found in Peter Simons, "Tatsache II," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter, Karlfried Gründer, and Gabriel Gottfried (Basel: Schwabe, 1998), 10: 913–16. See further John F. Fox, "Truthmaker," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 65, no. 2 (1987): 188–207; Herbert Hochberg, "Truth Makers, Truth Predicates, and Truth Types," in *Language, Truth and Ontology,* ed. Kevin Mulligan, Philosophical Studies Series 51 (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992), 87–117.

[177] Peter Simons, "How the World Can Make Propositions True: A Celebration of Logical Atomism," in *Skłonność Metafizyczna* [*Metaphysical Inclinations*], ed. Mieczysław Omyła (Warsaw: Uniwersytet Warszawski, 1997), 119.

[178] Peter Simons, "Existential Propositions," in *Criss-Crossing a Philosophical Landscape*, ed. Joachim Schulte and Göran Sundholm, Grazer Philosophische Studien 42 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992), 257.

if that *a* exists entails that *p*.[179] So, for example, what makes the statement "Al Plantinga is an avid rock-climber" true is the fact that *Al Plantinga is an avid rock-climber* or the state of affairs of *Al Plantinga's being an avid rock-climber*.

In defending divine simplicity, Michael Bergmann and Jeffrey Brower want to make God himself, not some fact or state of affairs, the truthmaker for all true, intrinsic predications about God.[180] So in order to have a unified account of predication, they propose an account, not in terms of the ascription of exemplifiables (however these are construed), but in terms of truthmakers which are concrete particulars.[181] If we want to have objects without propositional content as our truthmakers, then we should substitute broadly logical necessitation for the entailment relation holding between truth-bearers and their truthmakers. So Brower speaks of the relationship between a particular truthmaker and the predication it makes true in terms of broadly logical necessitation rather than entailment: If an entity *e* is a truthmaker for a predication *p*, then *e* is necessarily (or essentially) such that *p*.[182]

Now in the case of any contingent predication, its truthmaker cannot be the object denoted by the subject term of the predication, since that object

[179] Simons, "Existential Propositions," 257. On such an account, necessary truths would be made true by anything's existing. Perhaps the truthmaker theorist should say that for any truth-bearer *A* which has a truthmaker *a*, *A* is true in virtue of *a* (or *a* makes *A* true) only if *a*'s existence entails that *A* has the value *true*.

[180] A move anticipated by Oppy, "Divine Simplicity," 15–16. Bergmann and Brower focus on intrinsic predications, since no medieval ever thought that divine simplicity requires God to be identical with properties (if there are any) such as *being thought about by Anselm*, which are introduced by purely extrinsic predications. As Hughes explains, we can distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic properties in one of two ways: either (i) as those properties a thing has independently of any relation it bears to things outside of it or (ii) as those properties that could never vary between actual and possible perfect duplicates (Hughes, "Divine Simplicity," 5). (DS+) does not exclude that extrinsic properties might be truly predicated of God, for these do not inhere in Him.

[181] Michael Bergmann and Jeffrey E. Brower, "A Theistic Argument against Platonism (and in Support of Truthmakers and Divine Simplicity)," *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, ed. Dean W. Zimmerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2:374–85. According to Brower, what is needed is a general theory of predication and abstract reference that meets each of the following conditions: (1) True intrinsic predications of the form "*a* is *F*" guarantee the existence of entities that can be referred to by abstract expressions of the form "a's *F*-ness." (2) The entities referred to by such expressions are of a type whose instances can plausibly be both (i) identified with concrete particular substances (as in God's case) or contingent properties (as in Socrates' case) and (ii) distinguished at least conceptually from one another. Truthmakers, he believes, are the only type of entity that obviously meets both of these conditions. So he advocates the following "truthmaker account" of predication and abstract reference: "If an intrinsic predication of the form '*a* is *F*' is true, then *a*'s *F*-ness exists, where this entity is to be understood as the truth-maker for '*a* is *F*'" (Jeffrey E. Brower, "Making Sense of Divine Simplicity," *Faith and Philosophy* 25, no. 1 [2008]: 17, 23; cf. Jeffrey E. Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], 112–113).

[182] Brower, "Making Sense," 18, following Fox, "Truthmaker," 189. Note that Brower offers "only a partial analysis of the notion of truthmaking." This is because he wants to avoid "the absurdity that necessary truths – such as '2 + 2 = 4' – can have any existing thing whatsoever as their truthmakers." So his truthmaker principle states merely a necessary but not a sufficient condition for something's being a truthmaker.

does not necessitate the truth of the predication. For example, Plantinga himself cannot be the truthmaker of the statement "Al Plantinga is an avid rock-climber," since Plantinga could exist without being a rock-climber. In the case of God, however, since simplicity theorists deny any distinction between God and his essence, all God's properties are essential and so every true intrinsic predication about God is necessitated by God himself. Indeed, given his necessary existence, such predications are necessarily true. God can thus be the truthmaker of all true intrinsic predications about him, since God is necessarily such that these predications are true. In the case of creatures, predications will often be contingent, and so we must appeal to something like property instances or tropes, such as the particular redness we see in some object, in order to supply a concrete truthmaker of contingent predications, thereby implying a constituent ontology.[183] But in God's case such a constituent ontology is dispensable. Construing God to be the truthmaker for intrinsic predications about him does not entail that God does not have properties as constituent parts, but neither does it "require that God has any properties at all in the ontologically loaded sense of exemplifiables."[184] Thus if we adopt an anti-realist view of properties, as advocated here, the advocate of divine simplicity may adopt truthmaker theory to explain why intrinsic predications about God are true without positing properties as divine constituents.

Taking God to be the truthmaker of all true intrinsic predications about him does not entail divine simplicity. Truthmaker theory would permit a God who is composed, so long as God had no contingent properties or parts.[185] To deny that God, though having distinct essential properties as constituents, could be the truthmaker for all intrinsic predications about him would seem to require one to say both that (i) a true predication has at most one truthmaker and that (ii) God himself is somehow preempted by his constituent properties from being a truthmaker. But (i) is inconsistent with the characterization of the functional role of truthmakers, which is simply to necessitate the truth of predications;[186] and (ii) is a stipulation that

[183] Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity," 113.

[184] Brower, 112.

[185] Thus, although Brower thinks it too strong to hold, as some philosophers do, that concrete individuals like Socrates are the truthmakers for *all* their true essential predications, he allows that "it does seem plausible that a concrete individual can be the truth maker for a proper subset of its true essential predications – namely, each of its true *intrinsic* essential predications" (Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity, 111; cf. Brower, "Making Sense," 18).

[186] Brower says, "For our purposes, it will suffice to note that truthmaking must involve *some form* of broadly logical necessitation, so that even if *E*'s necessitating that *P* does not, by itself, *guarantee* that *E* is *P*'s truthmaker, it does make *E* a candidate – perhaps even a prima facie good candidate – for playing this role." That role is simply "that of necessitating (in a certain way) the truth of the predications it makes true" (Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity, 111).

is either ad hoc or takes God's proper parts to be more fundamental than himself. The doctrine of divine simplicity thus requires much more than God's being a truthmaker of all true intrinsic predications about him; rather a denial of a constituent ontology for God is also required.[187] The anti-realist about properties rejects the claim that God has any properties in the ontologically loaded sense of exemplifiables, despite our ability to conceptually distinguish his various perfections, and so has the option of availing himself of truthmaker theory in order to explain why intrinsic predications about God are true. The sticking point will come with whether there are contingent true intrinsic predications about God. Truthmaker theory cannot account for such predications' truth and so must deny that they are true, lest metaphysical constituents be admitted into God. This fact will doubtless diminish many anti-realists' enthusiasm for truthmaker theory.

The traditional arguments from divine aseity and perfection to some version of (DS+) therefore fail to persuade. In line with the modest (DS) we may agree that God does not have any proper parts, taking an anti-realist view of properties, even though we can make conceptual distinctions with respect to God. Given that (DS+) is incompatible with scriptural teaching, we already have sufficient reason, even apart from objections to the doctrine's plausibility and coherence, for rejecting the doctrine of (DS+).

5.4 Objections to (DS+)

We come at length to a consideration of objections to a strong doctrine of divine simplicity, which constitute, in truth, the epicenter of the contemporary debate. It is generally agreed that a strong doctrine of divine simplicity finds no support in Scripture and that the arguments of perfect being theology offered in its support are not cogent. The adherents of the doctrine therefore tend to argue at most that the doctrine has not been shown to be implausible or, at least, incoherent. It is fair to say, I think, that the defenders of (DS+), in dealing with the many objections to the doctrine's coherence or plausibility, find themselves back on their heels in the

[187] Brower therefore misleads in playing down the importance of a "constituency account" of divine simplicity (Brower, "Making Sense," 18). Not only is truthmaker theory compatible with God's having proper parts, but God's not having proper constituents does not imply truthmaker theory, for what Brower calls a "constituency account" makes no reference to truth, stating merely that "If an intrinsic predication of the form '*a* is *F*' is true, then *a*'s *F-ness* exists, where this entity is to be understood as a metaphysical constituent of *a*" (15). Brower takes metaphysical constituents to include improper parts. But then he gratuitously ascends semantically to speak of truth when he says, "to say that a given entity is *that in virtue of which* something is *F* is just to say it is *that which makes it F*, or alternatively, that which 'makes it true' that it is *F*" (16). By contrast John Fox's truthmaker axiom avoids semantic ascent altogether: "if *p*, some *x* exists such that *x*'s existing necessitates that *p*" (Fox, "Truthmaker," 189).

contemporary debate. One after another, ingenious responses to defeaters have been offered by the doctrine's defenders, only in turn to be themselves defeated.[188] Increasingly implausible and even desperate responses seem to be required to save the most recent defenses from defeat. Some defenders of the doctrine are finally driven to appeal to mystery in the face of seemingly unanswerable objections, while others capitulate by watering down the doctrine to a more acceptable articulation.[189]

5.4.1 Essence and Existence

The centerpiece of Aquinas' doctrine of divine simplicity is the thesis that God's essence is his existence, or that God is the act of being subsisting.[190] We have seen that it is ambiguous whether we should take this claim as an identity thesis or as a replacement thesis. Per (OAST) God and his existence are one and the same thing; but are God and his essence one and the same thing or are they, more accurately, not two different things, since God's pure act of being is not restricted by any essence to this or that sort of being? The advantage of the replacement view, as ibn Sīnā saw, is that it makes intelligible why God transcends the distinction between genus and species. If entities A and B are identical to some third thing C, then C must have all the properties possessed by A and all the properties possessed by B. So if God's being does not replace his essence but is identical to it, then God's act of being must fall under genus and species like every essence.[191] Unfortunately, if we say with ibn Sīnā that God has no essence, then we are bereft of any knowledge of God's nature, since God has no nature to be known.

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[188] See Brower, "Making Sense," 7–11; Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity," 106–110. For a more sympathetic survey of the parade of failed theories, see William Vallicella, "Divine Simplicity," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Spring 2019 Edition), §§2–4, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/divine-simplicity.

[189] For appeals to mystery see Dolezal, *God without Parts,* 210–211; Stump, "Aquinas's Quantum Metaphysics," 200–203. For watered down doctrines of divine simplicity see Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Absolute Simplicity," *Faith and Philosophy* 2, no. 4 (1985): 353–382, who advocate re-interpreting "Thomas' 'essential', 'necessary', 'accidental', and 'contingent' to refer to modalities that can be determined by inspecting some subset of possible worlds consisting of the branching time-lines emanating from a single possible initial world-state" (369); Immink, *Divine Simplicity*, 176–177; Hinlicky, *Divine Simplicity,* 135; Oliver D. Crisp, *Analyzing Doctrine: Toward a Systematic Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 70.

[190] Indeed, Hughes calls this thesis "one of the most central" claims, but at the same time "the single most baffling claim," that Aquinas makes about God. "Unfortunately," he says, "I don't know how to construe Aquinas' claim that God is *ipsum esse* in such a way that it fails to come out necessarily false" (Hughes, *Complex Theory*, 4–5).

[191] Cf. the incoherence of those who affirm that God is identical with his properties, however these are construed, since God must then have all the characteristics of a property. This problem has prompted the recourse to truthmaker theory, which replaces, rather than identifies, God's properties with God himself. On this view, God and his properties are not one and the same thing; rather God and his properties are not two different things.

On the other hand, if we say with Maimonides that God does have an essence and that it is identical to his existence, the result is the same, since we can have no conception of the pure act of being. The way we grasp the nature of a thing is by conceiving its genus and species, which God, as a simple being, transcends. Since God's essence is the inconceivable act of being, we can have no knowledge of God's essence. This consequence cannot be ameliorated by saying with the Cappadocians that in addition to his nature, God possesses many essential properties which we can know, for so to say is to sacrifice divine simplicity.

We saw that in his *Commentary on the Sentences* I.2.1.3, Aquinas distinguishes two opinions concerning whether there is a diversity of attributes in God. Some, like ibn Sīnā and Maimonides, say that "things which are attributed to God are verified of him in two ways: either by way of negation or by way of causality." Aquinas objects that the way of negation and the way of causality leave us with no basis for predications of various perfections to God:

> And according to this opinion it follows that all of the names which are said of God and creatures, are said equivocally, and that there is no likeness of the creature to the Creator from the fact that the creature is good or wise or something similar; and this is the express opinion of Rabbi Moses. According to this, what is conceived regarding the names of the attributes is not referred to God so that it is a likeness of something that is in him. Hence it follows that the notions of these names are not in God, as if having a proximate foundation in him, but rather a remote one; as we say of the relations which are said of God from time, for these relations are not found in God *secundum rem*, but rather follow upon the mode of understanding, as was said of intentions. And thus, according to this opinion, the notions of these attributes are only in the intellect, and not in the thing that is God; and the intellect discovers them from the consideration of creatures either by negation or by causality, as was said.[192]

This opinion thus evacuates our theological predications of significance.

On the other hand, he continues, "others, like Dionysius and Anselm, say that in God there exists in a preeminent way whatever perfection there is in creatures." "According to this opinion, therefore, the conceptions that our intellect conceives from the names of the attributes are true likenesses

[192] The comparison with temporal predicates is interesting. For Aquinas predicates like "Lord" come to be true of God at the moment of creation; but the associated relational accident inheres not in God but in creatures, so that the ascription of such a predicate to God is merely conceptual. Intentional relations are similarly said to be asymmetric. For example, if John envies Joe, then the relational accident *envious of* inheres in John but the relational accident *envied by* does not really inhere in Joe but is ascribed merely conceptually. Aquinas is exercised to affirm that God's perfections really exist in God, not simply in our mind.

of the thing that God is, even though they are deficient and not full, as are the other things that are like God. Hence, these notions are not only in the intellect, because they have their proximate foundation in the reality that is God."

The question is whether this second opinion is any more successful in warding off the agnosticism that Aquinas fears. We saw that Maimonides does not, in fact, deny that God has an essence but holds that God's essence just is existence pure and simple and that the divine essence is therefore beyond human description, except through negation or causality, neither of which positively characterizes the divine essence. Since Aquinas' conception of God is the same, how can he avoid Maimonidean agnosticism? R. C. Taylor says of Aquinas' rejection of Maimonides' skepticism: "Aquinas' point. . . is that if essence can in no way be attributed to God insofar as he is only being or subsisting being, then, properly speaking attributions through causality cannot pertain to Divine Essence at all."[193] He quotes with approval Kenneth Seeskind's conclusion: "If God bears no likeness to the created order, and if terms like *wise*, *powerful*, or *lives* are completely ambiguous when applied to God and us, the conception of divinity we are left with is too thin for the average worshipper to appreciate. . . . In the end, you are left with a God whose essence is unknowable and indescribable. Of what possible value is such a conception either to philosophy or religion?"[194] Notice that this conclusion is said to attend the view that God does have an essence, an essence which as pure being subsisting is unknowable and indescribable.

Thus, whether we think that God is being itself subsisting without an essence or that his essence is being itself subsisting, we do not know what God is.

Thomists have been forthright about this consequence of Thomas' doctrine. For example, Etienne Gilson writes:

> As Thomas Aquinas understands him, God is the being whose whole nature it is to be. . . an existential act. . . . To say that God 'is this' or that he 'is that', would be to restrict his being to the essences of what 'this' and 'that' are. God 'is' absolutely. . . . God is the being of which it can be said that, what in other beings is their essence, is in it what we call 'to be'. . . .
>
> Since, in God, there is no something to which existence could be attributed, his own *esse* is precisely that which God is. To us, such a being is strictly beyond all possible representation. We can establish *that* God is,

[193] Taylor, "Maimonides and Aquinas," 346.

[194] Kenneth Seeskin, "Maimonides," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Spring 2021 Edition), §8, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/maimonides.

> we cannot know *what* he is because, in him, there is no what; and since our whole experience is about things that *have* existence, we cannot figure out what it is to be a being who is only essence is 'to be'. . . .
>
> God is the pure act of existing, that is, not some essence or other, such as the One, or the Good, or Thought, to which might be attributed existence in addition. . . ; but Existing itself (*ipsum esse*) in itself and without any addition whatever, since all that could be added to it would limit it in determining it.[195]

Thomas' doctrine thus leads to a profound agnosticism about God, a conclusion which is, in the words of Eleonore Stump, "religiously pernicious."[196]

Moreover, the claim that God is *ipsum esse subsistens* is not only theologically objectionable but philosophically unintelligible.[197] It seems to involve a clear category mistake: things exist, but it is unintelligible to say that existing or *to be* exists. When we say that "____ exists," the blank is filled by some nominal expression, such as "God," but it makes no sense to assert that *exists* exists (or subsists).[198] "Insofar as the doctrine of divine simplicity involves category mistakes," William Hasker rightly remarks, "its assertions are either necessarily false or, perhaps better, simply unintelligible."[199] Of course, it is possible that the propositions that the

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[195] Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1955), 370–372. See also Etienne Gilson, *God and Philosophy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1946), 63; Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers,* 2nd ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), 3–4, 177, 218; Jacques Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, trans. Lewis Galantiere and Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1948), 22–34.

[196] Stump, "Aquinas's Quantum Metaphysics," 199. Cf. Taylor's comment: "Had Aquinas acceded to the reasoning of Maimonides, the vision of God's essence would have been precluded and his Christian teaching undermined" (Taylor, "Maimonides and Aquinas," 339).

[197] See the blistering critique of ibn Sīnā on this score by al-Ghazālī, *Incoherence of the Philosophers* [*Tahāfut al-falāsifah*] 6, who charges that the Islamic philosophers' assertion that the necessary being has no quiddity other than existence "is unintelligible." "Existence is not quiddity" and "Existence without quiddity and a real [nature] is unintelligible. . . . we do not comprehend an unattached existence but only in relation to a determinant real nature, particularly if it is determined as one entity. . . . It is as though [the philosophers] have said, '[There is] existence without [there being] an existent,' which is contradictory."

[198] Hughes aptly says:

> "if God were pure subsistent existence, then he would be identical with his existence. In that case – since God is not the existence of anything distinct from himself – God would be an existence, which was not the existence of anything but that existence. But supposing that something could be an existence, without being the existence of anything but that existence, is like supposing that something could be a shape, without being the shape of anything but that shape, or be a shadow, without being the shadow of anything but that shadow" (Hughes, *Complex Theory*, 21).

Duby dismisses this criticism for its "clumsiness in reading older theologians and the implications of their views" (Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 69). But the criticism seems entirely apt, since God's *esse* is held to be identical to that which exists, so that *esse* must exist.

[199] Hasker, "Is Divine Simplicity?," 704. Cf. Anthony Kenny's judgement that identifying God's existence with his essence is just so much sophistry and illusion and that identifying him as subsistent *esse* seems to be equivalent to an ill-formed formula (Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Being* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002], 193).

formulas in question are intended to express can be expressed in some other way that does not involve a confusion of categories. "If so, however, it is incumbent on the proponents of the doctrine to produce a clear and intelligible statement of what those formulas intend; in the process, no doubt, admitting that the formulas themselves, if taken at face value, do not and cannot express truths."[200]

Stump feels keenly this particular threat to the coherence of Thomas's doctrine. She observes that in Aquinas' commentary on Boethius' *De hebdomadibus*, as well as in *On Being and Essence*, where he references Boethius' work,[201] Thomas carefully distinguishes between *esse* and *id quod est* [that which is].[202] The latter is an individual thing itself. Aquinas calls attention to the fact that *id quod est* is something concrete and particular, whereas *esse* is neither. Moreover, Aquinas explains that insofar as being is predicated without a qualifying predicate it is maladroit to affirm that *esse* itself exists: "'to be' itself is not signified as the subject of 'being,' just as 'to run' is not signified as the subject of 'running.' Hence, just as we cannot say 'to run itself runs,' so we cannot say 'to be itself is;' rather, 'that-which-is' [*id quod est*] is signified as the subject of 'being,' just as 'that which runs' is signified as the subject of 'running'."[203] Stump notes that Aquinas, having worked so hard to distinguish between *esse* and *id quod est,* then goes on immediately to say something that is on the face of it quite surprising: "In simple things *esse* itself and *id quod est* must be really one and the same."[204] Similarly, in his *Summa contra gentiles* he states, "In a simple being, being and that which is are the same. For, if one is not the

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Dolezal complains that for Kenny "God *is* one being among others, whereas for Thomas God is the cause of being and so cannot be counted among those beings in general. He is existentially distinguished from all other existents not by this or that, but by the fact that in him existence is self-subsistent and is not received and marked off by an essence" (Dolezal, *God without Parts*, 108). Dolezal's assertion is self-contradictory: God is not one being among others, and yet he is distinguished from all other beings by the fact that in him alone existence is self-subsistent.

[200] Hasker, "Is Divine Simplicity?," 704.

[201] There Aquinas says with regard to the so-called intelligences (identified by the schoolmen with angels), "since . . . the quiddity of an intelligence is the intelligence itself, its quiddity or essence is itself *the very thing that exists* [*quod est ipsa*], and its existence received from God is that *by which* [*id quo*] it subsists in the nature of things; and because of this some people say that substances of this kind are composed of *what is* [*quod est*] and *that by which it is* [*quo est*] or of *what is* [*id quod est*] and *existence* [*esse*], as Boethius says" (Aquinas, *On Being and Essence* 4 [Robert Miller trans.]).

[202] Stump, "Aquinas's Quantum Metaphysics," 198–200.

[203] Thomas Aquinas, *An Exposition of the "On the Hebdomads" of Boethius* II.40–50.

[204] Thomas Aquinas, II.210. Aquinas goes on to say, "But that alone will be truly simple which does not participate in 'to be,' not inhering, in fact, but subsisting. This, however, can be but one. For if 'to be' itself has nothing else admixed other than that which is to be [*id quod est esse*], as has been said, it is impossible that this To Be Itself [*id quod est ipsum esse*] be multiplied through anything diversifying It, and because It has nothing outside Itself conjoined, it follows that It is susceptible of no accident. This – Simple, One, and Sublime – is God Himself" (II.240–250].

other, the simplicity is then removed."[205] Since Aquinas holds that God's *esse* is identical to God as *id quod est*, it follows that "to be" is after all in some sense the subject of "being." The challenge is to find a sense in which it can be coherently claimed that *esse* itself is.

All this might suggest that God is not an individual thing or being but just the pure act of being. But Stump worries that only an *id quod est* can exercise any causal efficacy or enter into any causal relations, so that if God is *esse* alone it seems that many of the standard divine attributes accepted by Aquinas could not be applied to God. Worse, on this view it cannot be coherently affirmed that God exists, since only an *id quod est* can be affirmed to exist. Thus, on this view Aquinas appears "caught in large, obvious self-contradictions."[206]

But how can *esse* and *id quod est* be identical in God, given their incompatibilities? How can *esse* be a subsisting thing? Stump appeals what she calls "quantum metaphysics," on the analogy of quantum physics, in order to save the doctrine of simplicity from its apparent contradictions. She explains,

> What kind of thing is it which has to be understood both as a wave and as a particle? We do not know. That is, we do not know the *quid est* of light. . . . quantum physics, which is our best attempt at understanding the kind of thing light is, requires alternately attributing to light incompatible characteristics.
>
> Analogously, we can ask: What kind of thing is it which can be both *esse* and *id quod est*? We do not know. The idea of simplicity is that at the ultimate *metaphysical* foundation of reality is something that has to be understood as *esse* – but also as *id quod est*. We do not know what kind of thing this is either.[207]

Unfortunately, quantum physics is too often used as a sort of black box to justify belief in incoherencies. Hasker is blunt in replying to Stump's gambit: "It seems, then, that we do not, strictly speaking, have here a coherent view of God's nature that is being proffered for our acceptance. What we have, rather, is a set of mutually incompatible propositions, each of which has something to be said in its favor, but at least one of which must be false."[208] This is actually too generous. For quantum physics is crucially

[205] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* I.38.6.
[206] Stump, "Aquinas's Quantum Metaphysics," 200.
[207] Stump, 202. She concludes, "For Aquinas, it is right to describe God as an *id quod est*, capable of creating, loving, and acting" – and, we might add, existing! – "but only with the proviso that it is *also* right to describe God as *esse*" (203).
[208] Hasker, "Is Divine Simplicity?," 721.

disanalogous to divine simplicity in at least two respects. First, quantum physics does not assert that light, for example, is both a wave and a particle. Rather, as Stump notes, wave-like behavior or particle-like behavior is observed in measurement situations alternately, not simultaneously. Wave-like or particle-like behavior is consistently displayed under different measurement situations, so that quantum mechanics is contradiction-free, unlike the claim that God is *ipsum esse subsistens*. Second, and more importantly, we have overwhelming empirical support for the equations of quantum mechanics, whereas the arguments in support of divine simplicity fail to justify a doctrine so strong as that God is being itself subsisting. We therefore have no ground for thinking that the doctrine, despite appearances, really is coherent.

Some defenders of divine simplicity seek to take refuge in the analogy of being: "existence" is predicated of God and creatures analogically, so we should not expect to grasp conceptually what it is for God to be the pure act of existence.[209] But such a recourse is as futile as it is unjustified. Existence does not plausibly come in degrees but is, like pregnancy, either/or.[210] As we saw, when Anselm spoke of God as more real than creatures, what he had reference to was not degrees of being, but the difference between contingent being and necessary being or beings that exist *ab alio* rather than

[209] See, for example, Dolezal, *God without Parts*, xvii, who believes that "The assumption that God and creatures are correlatives within a univocal order of being dominates [analytic] philosophy and is arguably the chief reason why their criticisms of the [doctrine of divine simplicity] fail to hit the mark" (cf. 29–30, 117). On the contrary, I should say, simplicity theorists' denial of what Dolezal calls "ontological univocism" is one of the chief reasons that their responses to defeaters of the doctrine are so implausible. By way of justification of an analogy of being, Duby offers the exegetical *non sequitur*: "Genesis opens the canon of Scripture by simply assuming the being of God and then giving an account of the being of all else, thereby implying that God cannot be located within the order of common being. . . . this signals a decisive relativization of philosophical reasoning, under which metaphysical terms and theorems can be only analogically applied to God" (Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 70). By contrast, he says, "analytic criticisms of divine simplicity often represent God as a being situated on the continuum of common being. . . . In Plantinga, Hughes and others, God is. . . then subsumed under possible-worlds logic" (71). Duby's misgivings are predicated upon his misunderstanding "world" in such contexts to mean "the created order." A possible world is simply a maximal description of reality and as such will include truths about God. Similarly, Dolezal asserts, "If God were yet another being in the world, even if the highest and most excellent, then the world itself would be the framework within which he must be ontologically explained. But as Creator, God is the sufficient reason for the world's existence and thus cannot be evaluated as if he stood together with it in the same order of being. It follows from this that God can neither be measured, nor his simplicity refuted, according to the modalities unique to created beings" (Dolezal, *God without Parts*, xviii). Here we have the same misunderstanding of "world," the conflation of "world" with "order of being," and the assumption that the relevant modalities are unique to, rather than shared by, created beings.

[210] Or, as Hughes puts it, "Existence is an on/off property: either you're there or you're not" (Hughes, *Complex Theory*, 27). So what could it mean to say that while creatures have *esse* in a limited or imperfect way, God has *esse* according to its full power? Hughes adds, "If the being God has is not any particular kind of accidental being [like *being white* or *being square*], I don't see how it could be anything other than existence – the existence whereby a being is an entity, which Aquinas calls *esse substantiale*. . . . if there is any intelligible content to the idea that there is a difference between having existence according to its full power, and having existence according to something less than its full power, I cannot grasp it" (27).

a se or beings that are transitory rather than eternal. Differences in mode or duration are not differences in the degree of existence something has. Thus, there is no good reason to think that "existence" is predicated non-univocally of God and creatures. In any case, such a recourse is futile, since, as Scotus saw, without some univocal core meaning to existence predicates concerning God and creatures, such as "opposed to nothingness," our predications of existence to God become equivocal and therefore meaningless. But if there is such a univocal core, then we may predicate existence of God and creatures in just that sense.

Peter van Inwagen is well-known for claiming not to understand the views of his interlocutors, which he sometimes therefore regards as "meaningless."[211] This epithet is not meant to be condescending or insulting. Rather van Inwagen emphasizes that in doing metaphysics we are straining at the very limits of our understanding and that it is therefore easy for metaphysicians, including himself, to make assertions that, despite appearances, are in fact meaningless. The claim that God's essence is existence or that God is the pure act of being subsisting is, I think, a prime example. Many Thomists freely deploy the jargon of school metaphysics, but often, I fear, without meaning. For example, Duby assures us that once we recognize that God transcends the field of common reality and embrace the analogical tenor of theological language, then:

> the claim of the identity of God and his existence appears, not as a nonsensical claim, but as a radical (but still analogical and intelligible) reorientation of the concept of existence in service to theological description. Here God does not conform to the dynamics of creaturely *esse*; rather, the concept of *esse* bends to the aseity and abundance of God and this then effects a chastening of *esse*: it has no ultimacy or autonomy but is, in its absolute primordiality, the abundant triune God himself, who allows creatures finitely to participate in *esse* (Acts 17.24–25)."[212]

[211] Namely, when he is confident that he would understand the explained view if it were meaningful. See, for example, Peter van Inwagen, "Against Ontological Structure," in *The Problem of Universals in Contemporary Philosophy,* ed. Gabriele Galluzzo and Michael J. Loux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 58.

[212] Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 84. It is therefore rather ironic when Duby says of criticisms of divine simplicity in contemporary analytic philosophy, "Like medieval scholasticism in its more indulgent moments, some of these criticisms risk becoming, to borrow Turretin's colourful language, an exercise of 'air-walkers' (ἀεροβατούντων) caught up in mere 'logic-choppings' (λεπτολογήμασι). That is, the analytic counterarguments risk becoming detached from scriptural substance and grounding and occupied with ethereal hypotheses about rational constructs and ways in which these might be fine-tuned and brought into the strictest coherence" (Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 68). Turretin's complaint in *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1992], 1:263, 266), about the presumptuousness of scholastic theology no more characterizes analytic criticisms than analytic defenses of divine simplicity. Ironically, Duby himself freely employs scholastic distinctions in defense of divine simplicity.

This looks to me like flowery nonsense.[213] Other Thomists more candidly admit that we have no idea of what it means to say that God is the act of being subsisting.

5.4.2 God and His Properties

The contemporary debate over divine simplicity has since 1980 swirled round the question of the relation between God and his properties. In that year Alvin Plantinga in his influential lecture "Does God Have a Nature?" charged that the traditional doctrine of divine simplicity, in stating that God is his wisdom, power, goodness, and so on, implied the identity of God and a property, which is metaphysically impossible.[214] Some sought to dismiss Plantinga's challenge by pointing out that for Plantinga properties are abstract objects, whereas for the medieval proponents of divine simplicity, they are not.[215] Such an easy refutation is misconceived, however. In the first place, the response at best seeks to show that within the medieval metaphysical framework, properties are not abstract objects, but it does nothing to show that the medievals were correct in that belief. If properties really are abstract objects, then it does not matter what the medievals thought; they got it wrong. Mere coherence within a given metaphysical framework is insufficient for the plausibility of the doctrine; the defenders of divine simplicity need to give a defense of the plausibility of that framework.[216]

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[213] Similarly, Bavinck's declaration: "God is the real, the true being, the fullness of being, the sum total of all reality and perfection, the totality of being, from which all other being owes its existence. He is an immeasurable and unbounded ocean of being; the absolute being who alone has being in himself" (Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:123). Perhaps the purpose of such religious language is merely to evoke an emotional response in the reader; but can anyone give assertoric content to such prose?

[214] There has also been considerable discussion whether it is intelligible to claim that all God's properties are identical with one another as well as with God. For example, to say that God does not have distinct properties seems patently false: omnipotence is not the same property as goodness. It might be said that God's omnipotence and goodness differ in our conception only, as manifestations of a single divine property, just as, say, "the morning star" and "the evening star" have different senses but both refer to the same reality, namely, Venus. But this response is inadequate. For the sense, not the referent, determines properties. *Being the morning star* and *being the evening star* are distinct properties both possessed by Venus; the same entity has these two distinct properties. In the same way *being omnipotent* and *being good* are not the same property (as are, say, *being even* and *being divisible by two*) but are clearly distinct properties, even though in God's case the same entity possesses both of these distinct properties. Even if God has a single super-rich property which entails all the divine perfections, just as the property of *being a natural number* entails an abundance of mathematical properties, each of the divine perfections has a distinct sense and is, hence, a distinct property, possessed by God along with his super-rich property. For discussion, see Richard Gale, *On the Nature and Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 24–29. I leave aside this debate to focus on the question of whether divine simplicity makes God a property.

[215] For an account see William Vallicella, "Divine Simplicity," §§2–3.

[216] Christian systematic theologians would be very imprudent to marry Christian systematic theology to a particular metaphysical framework, for then Christian theology stands or falls with that framework. The collapse of the medieval metaphysical framework occasioned a crisis for post-Reformation Protestant theologians of the 17th–18th centuries, who struggled to free Christian doctrine from its scholastic roots

Second, and more importantly, Plantinga's objection did not rest crucially upon his assumption that properties are abstract objects. Plantinga himself soon came to embrace the view that properties are not abstract objects but thoughts in God's mind, yet his objection that God could not be a property still remains (God is no more a thought in his own mind than he is an abstract object). Virtually any credible theory of properties will face the objection that God cannot be identical to a property, since properties have properties that God does not share.

Bergmann and Brower believe that what raises trouble for simplicity theorists is not just Platonism, but any theory that takes for granted the following thesis about predication:

> P. The truth of all true predications of the form "*a* is *F*" is to be explained in terms of a subject and an exemplifiable.[217]

Now the doctrine of divine simplicity requires that if an intrinsic predication of the form "God is *F*" is true, then God is identical with his *F*-ness. So given (P), God is identical to an exemplifiable. This leads to incoherence, as Brower explains,

> On the standard contemporary interpretation, the doctrine of divine simplicity requires that God is identical with each of his intrinsic properties. . . . The problem with this standard interpretation, however, is that it appears to lead directly to incoherence. If God is identical with each of his properties, then God must himself be a property. But *that* seems absurd. . . . For properties are, by their very nature, *exemplifiable* – that is, things that can be possessed, instantiated, or had. But no person could be a thing of that sort. Indeed, insofar as divine simplicity requires God to be a property, it appears to be not merely absurd, but guilty of a category mistake – that of placing a non-exemplifiable thing (namely, God) into the category of exemplifiables (namely, properties).[218]

It makes no difference if one conceives of properties, not as abstract universals, but as immanent, concrete universals: "The claim that God is a concrete universal seems just as problematic as the claim that he is an abstract universal. For by their very nature, universals are multiply exemplifiable entities. . . and concrete universals are typically regarded as

(Muller, *Divine Essence and Attributes*, 137). My own adoption of anti-realism with respect to abstract objects is not the adoption of a particular metaphysical framework, since many anti-realisms are on offer; rather it involves the rejection on theological grounds of one particular metaphysical framework, viz., Platonism.

[217] Bergmann and Brower, "Theistic Argument against Platonism," 362.

[218] Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity," 108.

constituents of the concrete particulars that possess them. Thus, interpreting simplicity in terms of concrete universals would have the consequence that God is both multiply exemplifiable and capable of serving as a constituent of other concrete particulars."[219] Therefore, defenders of divine simplicity must either offer and defend a theory of properties according to which properties are not exemplifiables or else identify some other category of non-exemplifiable things to replace properties.

Defenders of divine simplicity have struggled vainly to articulate some credible theory of properties according to which not all properties are exemplifiables, such that God can be identified with a property.[220] The problem is that the capacity for being exemplified is generally taken to be constitutive of, and hence inseparable from, the concept of a property. Brower points out that "This conception of properties is precisely the one lying behind the traditional view that properties are entities categorially distinct from substances. According to the traditional view, both properties and substances may be the subject of further properties, and hence can both be said to *exemplify* other things. But only substances are such that they cannot be *exemplified* by anything else."[221] So "the fundamental difficulty for any version of the property interpretation" may be succinctly stated as follows:[222]

1. God is a substance.
2. No substance can be a property (i.e., an exemplifiable).
3. Therefore, God cannot be identical with a property (no matter how entities of this type are conceived).

Brower opines that "the general failure of contemporary defenses of divine simplicity" is due to its defenders' extreme reluctance to abandon the standard contemporary interpretation of divine simplicity in terms of

[219] Brower, "Making Sense," 8.

[220] For example, Leftow, "Abstract Object?," 581–598 once defended the view that there could be properties that are concrete, particular substances and so incapable of being exemplified. For if God and a property *P* are one and the same thing, then this single thing must have all the features that God really has and all the features that *P* really has, which might turn out to be only a proper subset of the features we originally ascribed to God and *P*. So it might be the case that there is a substance like God that is an abstract object or a property like *P* that is a concrete, particular, unexemplifiable substance.

Again, William Vallicella, "Divine Simplicity: A New Defense," *Faith and Philosophy* 9, no. 4 (1992): 508–525, agreed that properties are exemplifiables, but he suggested that there could be a substance which, though not capable of multiple exemplification, can be uniquely exemplified by itself. So we can hold that God and his properties are identical and that God's properties can be exemplified only by themselves, that is, by God.

Brower classifies the views of William Mann and Katherin Rogers under this interpretation as well, but it seems to me that they are more accurately classed as interpretations which, like Brower's own, substitute some other entity in the place of a property.

[221] Brower, "Making Sense," 10.

[222] Brower, 10.

properties in favor of an interpretation based on an account of predication and abstract reference in terms of something other than properties.[223] Brower flatly concludes, "the claim that God is identical with a property really is absurd, and hence any interpretation of simplicity that requires its truth must be rejected as incoherent," a claim that he says he has defended elsewhere.[224]

Consulting the referenced article, we find that Brower did not, in fact, argue that the proffered interpretations are incoherent, but that they, lacking independent motivation, are "not only extreme, but also extremely ad hoc."[225] This criticism underlines what I said before, that the bare coherence of (DS+) within some metaphysical framework is insufficient to justify the systematic theologian's thinking the doctrine to be acceptable, especially if the metaphysical account is *outré*. It might be said that the coherence of the doctrine within an implausible metaphysical framework suffices, not for the truth of the doctrine but at least for its possibility; but as Brower observes, "any account of simplicity that could render the doctrine coherent without giving up the traditional conception of properties would be preferable."[226]

So consider interpretations of divine simplicity that take abstract singular terms to refer to something other than properties. Again, the floundering for a tenable solution continues.[227] We have already encountered the most recent entrant to the lists: truthmaker theory combined with a constituent

[223] Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity," 109.
[224] Brower, 110.
[225] Brower, "Making Sense," 11.
[226] Brower, 11.
[227] For example, William E. Mann, "Divine Simplicity," *Religious Studies* 18, no. 4 (1982): 451–471; William E. Mann, "Simplicity and Immutability in God," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (1983): 267–276, has vigorously defended the view that God is identical, not with his properties, but with his property instances, that is, concrete, particular instantiations of Platonic universals. For discussion see Thomas V. Morris, "On God and Mann: A View of Divine Simplicity," *Religious Studies* 21, no. 3 (1985): 299–318; William Mann, "Simplicity and Properties: A Reply to Morris," *Religious Studies* 22 (1986): 343–353; Gale, *Nature and Existence of God*, 24–29; Wolterstorff, "Divine Simplicity," 531–552; Brower, "Making Sense," 8–10. Mann can be interpreted to be substituting non-exemplifiable instances for properties rather than taking properties to be non-exemplifiable. Mann's view proved to be inadequate because property instances are dependent upon the Platonic universals which they instantiate, which fatally compromises divine aseity. If we excise from Mann's account the universals and rest content with the property instances alone, sometimes called tropes, the problem remains that tropes are dependent beings, not capable of existing on their own but inhering in something else.

Alternatively, Katherin Rogers, "The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity," *Religious Studies* 32, no. 2 (1996): 165–186, has pointed out that there are concrete particulars which the medievals call "actions" (*actiones*). Since God is identified as the very act of being subsisting, he can be simple without having a plurality of properties. Again, Rogers can be interpreted as substituting actions for properties; though Brower argues that the medieval tradition to which she appeals takes actions, at least in creatures, to be accidents inhering in or belonging to particulars. While Rogers is correct that the pure act of being, unrestricted by any essence, seems simple, her position just throws us back to the unintelligible claim that in God's case essence = existence.

ontology according to which God has no proper constituents. Because truthmaker theory does not specify the ontological category to which truthmakers belong, Brower maintains that one may give up the futile quest for a single kind of entity to serve as the explanation for the truth of true predications. Instead, one may allow both substances and properties to serve as truthmakers, as each case of predication merits. Like Socrates, God himself may serve as the truthmaker for essential, intrinsic predications about him, but unlike Socrates God has no contingent, intrinsic properties and so may serve as the truthmaker for all true intrinsic predications about him. By contrast, in Socrates' case, we have to allow his properties to serve as truthmakers for contingent, intrinsic predications about him. Truthmaker theory does not require that God be simple but that he have no contingent properties. Assuming that God has no proper constituents, God is both simple and the truthmaker of all true, intrinsic predications about him.

Now Brower (and Bergmann) are offering an account, not just of predication, but of abstract reference. Their truthmaker account says nothing about the referents of abstract singular terms other than that such referents exist:

> (TA): If an intrinsic predication of the form "*a* is *F*" is true, then *a*'s *F*-ness exists, where this entity is to be understood as the truthmaker for "*a* is *F*."

(TA) is meant to articulate a perfectly general theory of abstract singular terms: if "*a* is *F*" is true, then *a*'s *F*-ness exists. Brower claims that (TA) is "a theory of predication and abstract reference that permits the referents of abstract expressions of the form '*a*'s *F*-ness' to refer to entities belonging to the category of substance (namely, God himself). . . . the referents of such expressions can, at least in principle, be identified not only with concrete particulars in the case of God, but also with properties in the case of creatures."[228] But (TA) says nothing to legitimate taking the referents of abstract singular terms like "*a*'s *F*-ness" to be substances rather than properties; it is simply ambiguous or incomplete in this respect. Singular terms like "*a*'s *F*-ness" are naturally taken to refer to a property. For example, since "Socrates is human" is true, (TA) requires that Socrates' humanity exists. But Socrates' humanity, like Socrates' rationality or Socrates' whiteness, surely is a property, not Socrates himself. Similarly, since it is true that "God is wise and powerful," God's wisdom and God's power exist. Even if we agree that there is nothing "obviously absurd about saying that God is himself the truthmaker for each of the true (intrinsic) predications that

[228] Brower, "Making Sense," 18–19.

can be made about him,"[229] nevertheless it seems bizarre, if not absurd, to say that abstract singular terms like "God's power" or "God's wisdom" have as their referents not properties of God but God himself. If we say that "God's wisdom is manifest in the marvelous intricacies of nature" or "God displayed his mighty power in raising Jesus from the dead" the abstract singular terms "God's wisdom" or "God's mighty power" most plausibly have as their referents not God himself but one of God's properties. In identifying the referents of such singular terms as "God's faithfulness, "God's righteousness," "God's wrath," and so on with God rather than properties of God, Brower seems to be guilty of a category mistake.

The foregoing suggests that we are better advised to adopt a neutralist, deflationary account of reference, such I have articulated and defended,[230] so that we are not committed ontologically to properties by means of our abstract singular terms. Then we can maintain with equanimity that abstract singular terms often do refer to God's properties as well as creatures' properties without being ontologically committed to properties as metaphysical constituents of God. Such a position seems obligatory in any case, since (TA), interpreted in a metaphysically heavyweight sense, is outrageously inflationary ontologically. It constitutes not merely an extravagant meta-ontological criterion of ontological commitment but a criterion of existence itself. (TA) requires that if it is true that "The weather in Atlanta will be fine today," then the fineness of the weather in Atlanta exists and is a constituent of the weather in Atlanta, which therefore must also exist! If it is true that "Brady's winning drive was spectacular," then the spectacularness of Brady's winning drive exists and is a constituent of his winning drive, itself a socially constructed object. If it is true that "My grandfather is dead," then not only does my grandfather's deadness exist, but so does he. Examples of this sort could be multiplied indefinitely. Moreover, if we do allow properties to be the heavyweight referents of our abstract singular terms, then in many cases they cannot exist as concrete constituents of things but must be abstract objects – which, once again, subverts divine

[229] Brower, 17. Thus, Vallicella is far too quick to infer: "Now 'God's omniscience' and 'Socrates' humanity' are abstract nominalizations of 'God is omniscient' and 'Socrates is human,' respectively. So given that God and Socrates are the truthmakers of the respective essential predications, the nominalizations can be taken to refer, not to properties, but to these very same truthmakers' (William Vallicella, "Divine Simplicity," §5). Cf. Pruss' leap: "The claim that God's being merciful and God's being just are identical is, I take it, the claim that the ontological basis for predicating mercy of God is identical with the ontological basis for predicating justice of God. Or, in the above terminology, it is simply the claim that. . . the same thing is the minimal truthmaker of the claim that God is just and the claim that God is merciful" (Alexander R. Pruss, "On Two Problems of Divine Simplicity," in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008]: 1:153; cf. 166). So Crisp is justified, I think, in doubting that Brower's truthmaker account "does any work in making sense of the idea that omnipotence just is omnipresence" (Crisp, *Analyzing Doctrine*, 66).
[230] See *supra*, 97–100; see further my *God and Abstract Objects*, 453–475.

aseity. So we have every reason to take (TA), not in a metaphysically heavyweight sense, but in a metaphysically lightweight sense which is not ontologically committing.

Brower takes cognizance of this concern, writing, "On my interpretation . . . truthmakers are required not only to explain the truth of true predications of the form '*a* is *F*', but also to serve as the referents for their abstract counterparts – that is, expressions of the form '*a*'s *F*-ness'. This might seem problematic. For it is natural to assume that such abstract expressions can only refer to properties."[231] In response, Brower replies, "there is nothing to prevent us from rejecting this assumption, despite its naturalness, and simply stipulating, as my interpretation does, that expressions of the form '*a*'s *F*-ness' are technical terms whose referents are the truthmakers for the corresponding predications."[232] But the problem does not concern stipulating that the referents of such singular terms are truthmakers but that they are substances. We are not free to stipulate a category mistake. In view of its ontologically inflationary consequences, moreover, we have every reason to reject a metaphysically heavyweight reading of (TA), in which case there is no reason to make such an unnatural stipulation.

But if we reject Bergmann and Brower's account of abstract reference, then we shall have little incentive to affirm truthmaker theory as an account of predication, unless we treat it, too, as an exercise in make-believe. Divine simplicity will not require it, for the anti-realist about properties will agree that God's wisdom and power, for example, are not two different things (NTDT) because they are not things at all and therefore not constituents of God. What he will not agree with is the simplicity theorist's claim that God's wisdom and power are one and the same thing (OAST).

Moreover, it is questionable whether truthmaker theory really saves the day for the proponent of (DS+). For according to that doctrine God is simply the act of being subsisting. It is not restricted by any essence, nor does God have any properties at all. So how can such a pure, featureless subsistent suffice to make true such predications as "God is powerful" or "God is loving"? Recall that for the anti-realist God is powerful, loving, holy, eternal, omnipresent, and so on, in a univocal sense. We can conceptually abstract some of these aspects of God and reflect on them alone, just as by abstraction we can focus on a dog's brownness or fierceness or size alone, without thinking that it has these features as metaphysical parts. That the dog really is brown is evident from the way it blends in with the dry brush, and that it is fierce by the bites it has inflicted on innocent victims, and

[231] Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity," 114.
[232] Brower, 114.

that it is small by the little bed it sleeps in. As the medievals put it, there is a *disinctio rationis cum fundamentum in re* among its properties. But if God just is the pure act of being subsisting then the *fundamentum in re* for God's properties has been lost. No foundation seems to exist for true, univocal, diverse predications about God.[233] Aquinas could not bring himself to accept, with Maimonides, that God has no positive perfections and so affirmed, as we have seen, that all creaturely perfections are somehow to be found in God. But this affirmation seems to be incoherent doublespeak borne out of a commendable sensibility to biblical teaching that made him recoil from the apparent implications of the doctrine that God is the act of being itself subsisting.

5.4.3 Modal Collapse

Certainly one of the most serious objections to (DS+) is the objection that the doctrine leads to modal collapse, so that, absurdly, the actual world is the only possible world there is. For if God has no potentiality, if everything about him is essential to him, then he is intrinsically the same in every possible world. For were he in any way different in another possible world, he would have the potential to be as he is in the actual world, so that God is not pure actuality. He can therefore have no contingent knowledge or action, but necessarily knows and acts as he does. But in that case all modal distinctions collapse and everything becomes necessary. Since "God knows that *p*" or "God wills that p" is logically equivalent to "*p* is true," the necessity of the former entails the necessity of the latter. Thus, divine simplicity

[233] Noël B. Saenz, "Against Divine Truthmaker Simplicity," *Faith and Philosophy* 31, no. 4 (2014): 465, comes close to raising this concern. He thinks that since truthmakers are meant to explain the truth of certain intrinsic predications, "There needs to be a kind [of] match between what is true and its truthmaker. If it is true that something is some way, then what makes it true must be structured in the right kind of way if it is to explain why the predication applies to it." Thus it is not Socrates, but rather how Socrates is, that explains why a proposition like *Socrates is human* has the property of being true. Saenz's concern goes double, I should think, for a putative truthmaker that is utterly unstructured like *esse*. Yann Schmitt, "The Deadlock of Absolute Divine Simplicity," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 74 (2013): 127, is on point when he complains, "The problem is that we do not understand how a simple God without any ontological complexity could necessitate, in any precise meaning of 'necessitate' related to the minimal truthmaker requirement, the truth of different intrinsic predications." Therefore, he says, the idea that an absolutely simple entity "can be the minimal truthmaker of different intrinsic predications seems to me to be in complete opposition to the nature of truthmaking." Mullins notes that "In standard instances of truthmaking, the truthmaker for a proposition is the substance and the property it bears. For instance, the truthmaker for <Socrates is good> is the substance 'Socrates' and the property 'good' that Socrates bears." So Mullins asks, "What is doing the truthmaking in the instance of a simple God? A simple God has no properties, so how could a simple God serve as the truthmaker for the proposition <God is good>?" (R. T. Mullins, "Simply Impossible: A Case against Divine Simplicity," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 7 [2013]: 202–203). Mullins complains that this question is neglected in the literature, so that we are left with an "unexplained mystery" (202).

leads to an extreme fatalism, according to which everything that happens does so with logical necessity.[234]

Not only is such a denial of modal distinctions philosophically untenable, but, as R. T. Mullins points out, modal collapse is "odious to Christian theology" as well.[235] For it denies God's sovereignty over creation and his freedom to exist without creation, and by eradicating creaturely freedom, it has disastrous consequences for Christian dogmatics with respect to the problem of evil, grace, God's goodness, and so forth. "It is at this point that we can see that divine simplicity is a cruel mistress who has no tolerance for contingency and freedom."[236]

It might be said that Aquinas could escape modal collapse by his doctrine that God stands in no real relations to creatures. As a simple being, God transcends all the Aristotelian distinctions among substance and accidents, and since relations are one type of accident, God has no relational properties and stands in no real relations to things outside himself. Rather relations between God and other things inhere solely in the other things. Creatures stand in real relations to God, but the situation is not symmetrical: God's relations to creatures are just in our minds (*secundem rationis*), not in reality. Thus God is perfectly similar in all logically possible worlds which we can imagine, but in some worlds either different creatures stand in relation to God or no creatures at all exist and are related to God. Thus the same simple cognitive state counts as knowledge of one conjunction of propositions in one world and another conjunction of propositions in another world. Similarly, the same act of power (which just is the

[234] Thus, the problem entailed by modal collapse is much more serious than the problem often identified by critics of divine simplicity, namely, an incoherence in the theology of those who maintain both divine freedom and simplicity. For example, Mullins and Byrd argue that modal collapse "is a problem because . . . most classical theists wish to say that God's transitive acts are contingent and gracious, thus denying the conclusion" that the universe exists of absolute necessity (Ryan T. Mullins and Shannon Eugene Byrd, "Divine Simplicity and Modal Collapse: A Persistent Problem," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 14, no. 3 [2022]: 36). So saying soft pedals the problem, for the proponent of divine simplicity can bring consistency into his theology simply by giving up divine freedom. But that would still leave him with the absurdity of denying modal distinctions and affirming logical fatalism. The theological consequences of the doctrine of divine simplicity are, indeed, odious, but that is not the fundamental problem of modal collapse. When faced with proponents of divine simplicity like Rogers and McCann, who are willing to "bite the bullet" and deny divine freedom, Mullins and Byrd then fall back to the real problem, namely, "all of our modal intuitions scream against the idea of a modal collapse" (38).

[235] Mullins, "Simply Impossible," 196. Cf. R. T. Mullins, *The End of the Timeless God*, Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 138.

[236] Mullins, "Simply Impossible," 197. Mullins notes that one reason why al-Ghazālī rejected divine simplicity was that the medieval Muslim philosophers' doctrine of divine simplicity led them to deny that God had volition and will in regards to creation, so that everything happens of necessity (195). Indeed, in his *Incoherence of the Philosophers* [*Tahāfut al-falāsifah*] 6, Ghazālī anticipates the modal collapse objection, holding that God's knowledge of his relations with the universe "cannot be identical with a knowledge of the essence." He repudiates ibn Sīnā's claim that God's "knowledge of himself and of others – indeed, of all things – constitutes his essence without any addition. This is the very contradiction of which the rest of the philosophers were ashamed because of the manifest contradiction at first reflection."

divine being) has in one world effects really related to it in the form of creatures and in another world no such effects.

But Thomas's doctrine only serves to make divine simplicity more incredible.[237] For it is incomprehensible how the same cognitive state can be knowledge that "I exist alone" in one world and that "I have created myriads of creatures" in another. It is equally unintelligible why a universe of creatures should exist in some worlds and not others if God's act of power is the same across worlds. The reason cannot be found in God, since he is absolutely the same. Neither can the reason be found in creatures themselves, for the reason must be explanatorily prior to creatures. Thus, to contend that God stands in no real relations to things is to make the existence or non-existence of creatures in various possible worlds independent of God and utterly mysterious.[238]

On the contemporary scene, in an effort to save divine simplicity from implying modal collapse, defenders of divine simplicity have similarly adverted to what has been called an extrinsic or externalist model of divine knowledge and volition, according to which God's contingent knowledge and will may vary across worlds without involving any intrinsic variation in God.[239] Predications about God's knowing or willing creatures are said not to be intrinsic but to be extrinsic and so may vary in truth value from world to world without any intrinsic difference in God.

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[237] See Katherin A. Rogers, "An Anselmian Approach to Divine Simplicity," *Faith and Philosophy* 37, no. 3 (2020): 308–322, who prefers modal collapse to Aquinas' doctrine.

[238] I take this to be the thrust of Omar Fakhri's complaint that "if the cause of this universe is the same in all possible worlds, but it can bring about different effects in different worlds, then this fact too cries out for an explanation" (Omar Fakhri, "Another Look at the Modal Collapse Argument," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 13, no. 1 [2021]: 4). Cf. Joseph Schmid's worry that divine simplicity undermines divine providence: "For under classical theism, one can fix *all* the facts about God himself and yet *any creation whatsoever* (or no creation at all) among the infinite array of possible creations can spring into being with a dependence on God" (Joseph C. Schmid, "The Fruitful Death of Modal Collapse Arguments," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 91, no. 1[2021]: 17–18). Steven Nemes, who denies that a difference in the effect requires a difference in the cause, fails to get the point when he responds, "It may be true that there would be no answer to the question of why this world was created rather than another one, but it would still be the case that every actual fact which obtains is effected by God and owes its reality to him" (Steven Nemes, "Divine Simplicity Does Not Entail Modal Collapse," in *Roses and Reasons: Philosophical Essays*, ed. Carlos Frederico Calvet da Silveira and Alin Tat [Bucharest: Eikon, 2020], 116).

[239] See W. Matthews Grant, "Divine Simplicity, Contingent Truths, and Extrinsic Models of Divine Knowing," *Faith and Philosophy* 29, no. 3 (2012): 257. Note that this is a better way of putting the point than saying that God's contingently knowing or willing implies some entity intrinsic to God that would not otherwise exist (255), since the anti-realist would not accept a metaphysically heavyweight reading of such a claim. Duby seems to adopt an externalist solution but without consideration of its problems (*Divine Simplicity*, 196–202). Similarly, Barry Miller's attempt to avoid positing potentiality in God by offering the paraphrase, "God's creation of the universe is an object of the divine will in less than every possible world" (Barry Miller, *A Most Unlikely God: A Philosophical Enquiry into the Nature of God* [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996], 167) seems to me to require some sort of externalism concerning God's will.

But this attempt to save divine simplicity remains just as implausible as Thomas' doctrine of no real relations.[240] Brower thinks that God's knowing that creatures exist requires only that God stand in a certain cognitive relation to the contingent truth that *creatures exist* and that creatures do in fact exist. With respect to divine volitions, Brower suggests that we dispense with volitions as causal intermediaries between God and his effects and just identify God's volitions with his agent causal relations.[241]

I fail to see that this solves anything, for in order to stand in a certain cognitive relation to a proposition *p*, like *believing that p* or *knowing that p*, God must be in a certain intrinsic mental or cognitive state, and it is incredible that the same cognitive state could be involved in *believing that p* and *disbelieving that p*.[242] If God's intrinsic cognitive state is the same in both cases, then the difference in relation must be due solely to the truth value of *p*, and it is mysterious how *p*'s truth value could render the same cognitive state belief on the one hand and disbelief on the other. Similarly, with respect to divine acts of willing, taking Brower's very sensible advice about dispensing with volitions as causal intermediaries does not seem to solve anything, for in order to stand in different causal relations to different effects God must undertake different exercises of divine power. Indeed, in refraining from creation, as God is free to do, he exercises no act of power at all but refrains from any such exercise. So again, it is inexplicable why in some worlds God stands in an agent causal relation to creatures while in others he does not, if God is intrinsically similar across worlds.[243] Moreover, in holding that God is able to stand in different agent causal relations to

[240] Indeed, Brower rightly observes that his externalist account is similar to "the traditional description of the difference between worlds in which God creates different creatures (or none at all) as a difference in the effect" (Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity," 126). Mullins rightly protests, "God's intentional acts quite clearly refer to the cause (i.e., God), and not the effect. . . . intentional acts are intrinsic to agents. In the case of the simple God, his intentional acts are not merely intrinsic to him, they are identical to him" (R. T. Mullins, "Classical Theism," in *T & T Clark Handbook of Analytic Theology*, ed. James M. Arcadi and James T. Turner, Jr. (London: T & T Clark, 2021), 95). For widespread criticism of the view that God's act is invariable but creaturely effects differ, see Mullins and Byrd, "Modal Collapse," 43–47). In this article, as well as his "Classical Theism," Mullins focuses on the modal collapse objection based on divine willing ("intentional acts") and in his piece with Schmid (note 248) on the modal collapse objection based on divine knowing.

[241] Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity," 126.

[242] I have to agree with Hasker that "'Knowledge' that involves no distinctive intrinsic state of the knower is, it seems to me, simply unintelligible" (Hasker, "Is Divine Simplicity?," 712). I thus find myself in good company, according to Colin McGinn: "I believe it is correct to say that [content] externalism, once it is forcefully and vividly stated, strikes many people as a strange and bizarre theory – a theory that simply couldn't be true. It seems to these people to fly in the face of some deeply rooted conception or picture of the mind and its states" (Colin McGinn, *Mental Content* [New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989], 14). That conception, he thinks, is substance dualism about the mind and body. If he is right, then since theism is a substance dualism, theists should reject content externalism.

[243] Leftow rightly complains, "This looks uncomfortably like declaring the problem solved by magic" (Brian Leftow, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity and Divine Freedom," in Timpe, *Metaphysics and God*, 34).

creatures we seem to ascribe potentiality to God, the potentiality to create or to refrain from creating, in contradiction to the claim that God is pure actuality.

Such a solution, in other words, seems to force us to deny so-called "content essentialism," the view that belief states have their propositional content essentially. The same applies to acts of willing. Acts of willing have, like belief states, propositional content, in that just as one may believe that *p*, so one may will that *p*. According to content essentialism, for any beliefs (or acts of willing) *x* and *y*, if *x* and *y* have different propositional content, they are not the same belief (or act of willing), and if a belief (or act of willing) has a particular propositional content *p*, then there is no possible world in which that same belief (or act of willing) lacks *p*. If the systematic theologian is being asked to abandon content essentialism in order to maintain the doctrine of divine simplicity, then the doctrine exacts too much.[244]

W. Matthews Grant contends that one may retain content essentialism if one is willing to give up the assumption that belief states (and, implicitly, acts of willing) are intrinsic states of an agent.[245] He points out that content essentialism does not specify how the propositional content of a belief state (or act of willing) is determined. Thus, one could embrace both content essentialism and so-called content externalism, the view that propositional content can vary without any intrinsic variation in a subject's cognitive states. One can affirm both content essentialism and content externalism

[244] Alexander Pruss maintains that some content externalism seems innocent. Suppose, for example, that on Earth the common colorless, tasteless, wet substance is H_2O, while on Twin-Earth it is XYZ. It is plausible, he suggests, that my mind is in the same intrinsic state when I think about what I call "water" as when someone like me on Twin-Earth thinks about what he calls "water." Nonetheless, I am thinking about H_2O and he about XYZ. Thus, thinking about H_2O is not an intrinsic property of me, and thinking about XYZ is not an intrinsic property of him. Pruss thinks that these essentialist considerations support a moderate content externalism (Pruss, "Two Problems," 160). I have misgivings. It seems dubious that the propositional content of our ordinary beliefs about water involve reference to H_2O, as evident from the fact that people have held such beliefs long before it was discovered that the atomic constituents of water are H_2O. In any case, Pruss acknowledges that "in the case of God's beliefs or willings, this content externalism applies to all contingent propositions, not just the ones that involve natural kinds or *de re* particulars" (160). So "Saying it is an extrinsic property of God that he has a particular belief or engages in a particular willing has substantial and controversial conclusions. It implies that radical content externalism is true of God's beliefs and acts of will" (160).

The objection of Mullins and Byrd that such a view entails a denial of divine freedom because God cannot act otherwise than he does, given that his act is identical to his existence (Mullins and Byrd, "Modal Collapse," 26–32) fails to come to grips, I think, with the radical nature of content externalism. For while God's act cannot vary across worlds, the propositional content of what God wills does vary from world to world, so that in different worlds God does indeed will otherwise than he does. The same intrinsic act of willing is in one world refraining from willing that creatures exist and in another willing that creatures exist. Such an externalist view seems to be advocated by Francis Turretin (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* 1:193), who maintains that God's acts of intelligence and will are necessary "as to internal existence, but free as to external relation."

[245] Grant, "Divine Simplicity, Contingent Truths," 257–274. Cf. W. Matthews Grant, "Divine Simplicity," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021), https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119009924.eopr0112.

provided one denies that a belief or act of willing whose content is externally determined is intrinsic to its subject. "Allowing that a mental state might be extrinsic to its subject suggests the possibility that the state is at least partially constituted (and, given Content Essentialism, essentially constituted) by the extrinsic items that determine its content."[246]

To my mind, Grant's proposal is even more incredible than the view that God's belief states and acts of willing are intrinsic to him but have their propositional content extrinsically.[247] It requires us to believe that God's cognitive states are not intrinsic states of God, which seems desperate. Moreover, as Schmid and Mullins remind us, in a possible world in which God refrains from creation and so exists alone, there is nothing extrinsic to God, not even propositions on pain of denial of divine aseity.[248] So God's knowledge or belief that "I am alone" cannot be predicated of God extrinsically, for he does not stand in relation to any such truth bearer. It is of no avail to appeal to content externalism, since in a world in which God alone exists, there just is nothing apart from God that could serve as the content of God's mental states.[249]

It is therefore noteworthy that defenders of the doctrine of divine simplicity increasingly find themselves driven to affirm some sort of externalism in order to defend the doctrine from the threat of modal collapse. Christopher Tomaszewski has recently alleged that certain formulations of the modal collapse argument illicitly assume that co-referring terms may be substituted *salva veritate* in intensional, specifically modal, contexts and are therefore invalid.[250] He has in mind a formulation like the following:

1. Necessarily, God exists.
2. God is identical to God's act of willing (or knowing).
3. Therefore, necessarily, God's act of willing (or knowing) exists.

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[246] Grant, "Divine Simplicity, Contingent Truths" 259.

[247] This fact stands wholly apart from the mare's nest of difficulties that each of his three proposed extrinsic models involves.

[248] Joseph C. Schmid and R. T. Mullins, "The Aloneness Argument against Classical Theism," *Religious Studies* 58, no. 2 [2021]: 1–19. They draw an instructive analogy to the case of a world in which there exists a sole electron. An exact duplicate of that electron could exist in a world in which it is surrounded by other objects. So its existing alone is not an intrinsic property of it but a negative extrinsic property. By contrast, if God is in the state of believing that he is alone, then in a world in which other things co-exist with him he would not be in such a duplicate belief state. "For God's knowledge is not a negative property/feature reporting some absence, failure, or lack of God's. In regard to divine knowledge, we are talking about some positive reality that God has or possesses" (7–8).

[249] – leading some externalist thinkers to the theologically unacceptable conclusion that God is not free to refrain from creation (Timothy O'Connor, "Simplicity and Creation," *Faith and Philosophy* 16, no. 3 [1999]: 405–412).

[250] Christopher Tomaszewski, "Collapsing the Modal Collapse Argument: On an Invalid Argument against Divine Simplicity," *Analysis* 79, no. 2 (2019): 275–284.

Such an argument is said to be analogous to the argument:

4. Necessarily, 9 > 7.
5. The number of the planets = 9.
6. Therefore, necessarily, the number of the planets > 7.

John Waldrop has shown, however, that many formulations of the modal collapse objection do not involve substitution of co-referential terms in an intensional context and that those that do can be reformulated so as to become unproblematic.[251] Tomaszewski himself considers three ways of repairing the argument to make it valid: (i) using a necessary identity statement for (2); (ii) taking "God's act of willing (or knowing)" to be a rigid designator, picking out God in every possible world; and (iii) reformulating the argument based on Leibniz's Law of the Indiscernibility of Identicals. In each case Tomaszewski's rejection of the repair effort seems to depend crucially on externalism. In response to (i) he says,

> What follows from DDS is the necessary identity of God with God's act. But that God's act is an act of creation is a contingent fact not entailed by DDS. DDS tells us only that God is necessarily identical with God's act; it does not tell us anything about what the effects of that act are.[252]

This reply requires externalism; otherwise, God's act of willing is intrinsically an act of creation. We need not consider its effects; we just examine the act itself. In response to (ii) Tomaszewski writes,

> Here, the opponent of DDS may object: if 'God's act of creation' designates God at all, it must do so in virtue of something intrinsic to God, for acts are intrinsic to their actors. And since God is necessarily how he is intrinsically, if it designates God in virtue of his intrinsic act, it must do so in every possible world, and therefore designate God rigidly.
>
> But this isn't the case. While God's act is indeed intrinsic (and therefore identical) to him, 'God's act of creation' designates that act, not how it is in itself, but by way of its contingent effects. . . . This is parallel to the way in which 'the Creator' designates God, not how he is in himself, but rather by way of the contingent effects of his act.[253]

Again, this reply seems to presuppose externalism with respect to God's acts of willing. Otherwise "God's act of creation" would, as

[251] John William Waldrop, "Modal Collapse and Modal Fallacies: No Easy Defense of Simplicity," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (2022): 161–179.
[252] Tomaszewski, "Modal Collapse Argument," 280.
[253] Tomaszewski, 280.

Tomaszewski puts it, designate that act as it is in itself. With respect to (iii), Tomaszewski says,

> It must not only be true that the entity designated in the actual world by 'God's act of creation' has the property of necessary existence, but also that in every possible world, that entity is *in that world* an act of creation. This is so because while the entity designated in the actual world by 'God's act of creation' (i.e. God) exists in every possible world, a creation exists only in those worlds where this entity not only exists but also is an act *of creation* (i.e. the worlds in which God in fact creates).[254]

Unless one is an externalist, it seems, it is indeed true that the entity designated by "God's act of creation" is in every world an act of creation. That the act entails the existence of effects does not imply that an externalist account of God's acts of willing is true. So all of Tomaszewki's efforts to stave off modal collapse depend on externalism.[255]

Similarly, in his reply to the modal collapse objection, Joseph Schmid relies on externalism with respect to God's acts of willing. If we take (2) to refer to God's actual act of willing (or knowing), then "God's act of willing" is a rigid designator and the above argument admittedly becomes valid and non-question-begging. So

> if God's creative act necessitates its effect – then modal collapse straightforwardly ensues . . . .The *only* way for the classical theist to avert modal collapse, then, is to deny [Necessarily, if God's actual act of creation exists, the actual creation exists]. Thus, the classical theist can only avert modal collapse if God's act merely *indeterministically* produces its effects. Across all possible worlds, God's one, simple act remains utterly the same, whereas the various created outcomes are different."[256]

This is straightforward externalism concerning God's acts of willing.

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[254] Tomaszewski, 282.

[255] Fakhri, "Another Look," 2, would therefore formulate the objection to make explicit his own rejection of externalism:

> (1) God is intrinsically identical in all possible worlds.
> (2) The same identical cause brings about the same effect.
> (3) God is the cause of this universe.
> (4) Therefore, God causes this universe in all possible worlds.

The second premise closes the door to externalism concerning God's acts of willing.

[256] Schmid, "Fruitful Death," 5–6. Schmid later summarizes:

> "In worlds in which that self-same act gives rise to *no* creation, one can truly predicate, of that act, that it is a divine refraining-from-creating act and that the act is absolutely necessary.*
>
> * All that's needed is that the relevant predication is true not in virtue of how God is in himself but instead in virtue of creation's dependence (or lack thereof) on God. In other words, all we need is that the relevant predication is *extrinsic*" (Schmid, "Fruitful Death," 14).

This explanation commits Schmid to both truthmaker theory and externalism.

Again, in response to the modal collapse objection as I have formulated it – which does not involve the substitution of co-referential terms in an intensional context, but appeals to the fact that if God is able to know or will differently than he does, then God has unactualized potentiality, in contradiction to the claim that God is pure actuality, Schmid resorts to externalism:

> The classical theist will. . . say that God's 'doing something different' merely amounts to a different state of affairs' obtaining (with a dependence on God). To say (without further, independent justification) that this requires God himself to have some unactualized potential is to beg the question against the classical theistic position, according to which God is not cross-world different despite creation being cross-world different.
>
> . . . God's act (with which he is identical) is fully, wholly, and purely actual. But this act can indeterministically give rise to different effects across different worlds. And we truthfully predicate 'does A (not B) in w_A' and 'does B (not A) in w_B' of God *not* in virtue of *God's* being (intrinsically or entitatively) different across such worlds, but *instead* in virtue of A indeterministically coming about in w_A with a dependence on God (in the former case) and (in the latter case) B indeterministically coming about in w_B with a dependence on God.[257]

This is nothing more than a reiteration of Aquinas' explanatorily impoverished doctrine of no real relations in God to creation.

Schmid has a second response to this formulation of the objection: traditional theists who do not hold to divine simplicity face a similar problem. For on their view, since God is free, there must similarly be an indeterministic link between everything necessary in God (such as his essential attributes) and everything contingent in God (such as his contingent acts of willing and knowing).[258] If such an indeterministic link between God's necessary and contingent features is acceptable, then so is an indeterministic link between God's acts of willing and the world. Schmid's *tu quoque* retort does not impress. Because God is a personal, libertarian agent, an indeterministic link between his necessary and contingent features is both mandatory and appropriate. But it is a misnomer to speak of an indeterministic link between God's acts of willing or knowing and their objects. Here it is a matter of infallibility, not determinism.[259] In virtue of his omnipotence

[257] Schmid, 10–11.

[258] Schmid explains that while those necessary features do not fully explain the contingent features, they are partially explanatory, since God contingently acts as he does (and believes as he does) at least in part because of who he is (e.g., because he is loving, merciful, just, etc.).

[259] Schmid introduces a Pickwickian sense of determinism unconnected with freedom of the will: "Deterministic causation occurs just in case it is impossible that the cause C occurs without its effect E" (Schmid, "Fruitful Death," 6). Nemes similarly fails to discern the difference between determinism and infallibility with respect to God's volitions (Nemes, "Divine Simplicity," 116). God's volitions are not determined, but they produce their effects infallibly.

and omniscience, God's acts of will infallibly produce their effects and God's acts of believing infallibly track truth. There is therefore no room for a fallible link between God's acts of willing or knowing and their objects. Neither are his acts free agents who can choose which effects to produce or propositions to believe. Therefore, the cases are not parallel.

All this bears out Waldrop's judgement that "the genuine debate over divine simplicity and modal collapse is substantially a controversy over the metaphysics of divine action."[260] For "the only plausible way, for the defender of DDS to avoid modal collapse . . . is to deny that the conclusion, the claim that the actual divine creative act necessarily exists, has any fatalistic import."[261] Externalism is just such a strategy. Tomaszewki points out that since an intrinsic account of God's acts of willing and knowing is not an entailment of the doctrine of divine simplicity, he has succeeded in showing that the doctrine has not been demonstrated to lead inevitably to modal collapse and, hence, incoherence or absurdity. Whether divine simplicity or traditional theism entails an intrinsic account of God's acts of willing and knowing may be left a moot point.[262] For as I have been wont to emphasize, the question for the Christian systematic theologian is whether the doctrine of divine simplicity is plausibly true, not whether its

[260] Waldrop, "Modal Collapse," 161 – that is, if we ignore the objection based on God's acts of knowing. Waldrop contends that "any important and relevant metaphysical connection between the conclusion of the . . . argument and fatalism depends on something like the following essentialist thesis concerning divine action:"

> (E) Necessarily, something is a divine creative act only if it is essentially the unique divine creative act (168).

He states that "the only available response" for the defender of divine simplicity in the face of modal collapse is to reject (E) and hold instead that it is contingent whether or not God's act is an act of creation (177). Waldrop packs into (E) the notion that God's act is identical to his act in the actual world. He explains, "If God's act of being is possibly a creative act, then (E) says that it could not be other than a creative act. If we add that whether or not God's act is a creative act is determined extrinsically, that doesn't blunt the force of (E) one bit: all we get is the added conclusion that the divine creative act is essentially *extrinsically determined* to be a creative act" (John Waldrop to William Lane Craig, July 14, 2021).

[261] Waldrop, "Modal Collapse," 168.

[262] Mullins, for example, responds to Tomaszewki by contending that divine simplicity entails taking "God's act of creation" to be a rigid designator: "in the case of the simple God, the designation of God's acts. . . is rigid because God's intentional actions are *identical* to God's existence, as is explicitly endorsed by classical theists. . . . 'God's act of creation' rigidly designates God on pain of violating the identity claims of divine simplicity. To say otherwise is to abandon divine simplicity" (Mullins and Byrd, "Modal Collapse," 34). On Thomism God is necessarily the pure act of being, and that act of being is identical to his acts of willing and knowing. In effect, Mullins identifies God with his actual acts of willing and knowing, which Schmid recognizes to be rigidly designated. Note that Schmid acknowledges that defenders of divine simplicity must seemingly deny an "intuitively plausible understanding of the nature of intentional action. For God's act of creation is certainly an intentional act (if only analogously so). That God is personal and hence intentionally acts is a core commitment of traditional theism" (Schmid, "Fruitful Death," 15). Mullins and Byrd's presupposition all along has been that theists understand God's acts of willing to be intrinsic, intentional acts. Moreover, Mullins holds that on classical theism, it is impossible that God's acts of willing occur without their respective effects, and therefore they are in Schmid's Pickwickian sense deterministic. It is therefore baffling that Schmid can breezily assert that in order to defeat the modal collapse objection, "All that's needed is indeterministic causation – that is, causation in which the existence of the cause, C, does not necessitate the existence of the effect, E" (Schmid, "Fruitful Death," 13).

bare coherence may be purchased at the expense of desperate expedients.[263] The modal collapse argument, in requiring the divine simplicity theorist to advert to externalism, shows that (DS+) is not plausibly true.

Mullins reports that in the face of modal collapse, "By far, the most common response from classical theists is to appeal to ineffable mystery."[264] For example, Dolezal, after considering "various attempts to rescue divine simplicity and freedom," in the end affirms, "the *modality* of divine freedom is entirely beyond our grasp. . . .while simplicity roots the absoluteness of God's freedom, neither of these divine characteristics is comprehensible to us though both are indispensable to the confession that God is most absolute."[265] Such an appeal to mystery is appropriate only if one has some overriding reason to think that one's beliefs are true and so merely paradoxical.[266] But arguments in favor of (DS+) can hardly be claimed to provide such an overriding reason.

5.4.4 The Trinity

Although contemporary philosophical theologians, preoccupied with problems enough concerning the coherence of divine simplicity on generic theism, tend to ignore the problem of the coherence of divine simplicity with the doctrine of the Trinity,[267] it is theologically noteworthy – as well as

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[263] By contrast, in the same way that cosmologists enjoy playing with toy models of the universe which no one imagines to be accurate depictions of reality (to be "true"), so philosophers enjoy the challenge of defending a doctrine widely regarded as false or incoherent, even if they do not believe in it.

[264] Mullins, "Classical Theism," 96; Mullins and Byrd, "Modal Collapse," 40. There should be no talk in respect to this objection of so-called conditional or hypothetical necessity (Stump and Kretzmann, "Absolute Simplicity," 367–374), for this notion is relevant only to God's mutability, not to the contingency of his knowledge and will. For example, given that God has already willed to create the world, the existence of the world is conditionally necessary in that it is now too late for God to will to refrain from creation; or again, given divine foreknowledge of future contingents, God's knowledge of those events is conditionally necessary, since it is logically impossible to change the future. But in both cases, there are possible worlds in which God does otherwise, that is, refrains from creation and has a different foreknowledge. So conditional necessity is a red herring with respect to modal collapse. In the end Stump and Kretzmann are forced to recur to some sort of externalism: "the mere fact that one thing is related in different ways to different things does not entail that it has distinct *intrinsic* properties, only distinct Cambridge properties" (372).

[265] Dolezal, *God without Parts*, xx. Dolezal compares the incomprehensibility of the claim that God is simple yet free with the incomprehensibility of the claim that God's essence is existence: "Just as we cannot comprehend God as *ipsum esse subsistens*, we cannot comprehend the identity between God as eternal, immutable, pure act and his will for the world as free and uncoerced" (210).

[266] See William Vallicella, "Divine Simplicity," §4.3.

[267] For a notable exception, see Hughes, *Complex Theory*, Pt. II. Hughes proposes a model of the Trinity analogous to Jeffrey Brower and Michael Rea's view (see this *Systematic Philosophical Theology*, vol. IIb, *De Deo*: *De Trinitate*) that the persons of the Trinity are con-substantial in the sense that the divine persons are all made out of the unique divine substance, just as a statue and a pillar can be distinct objects made out of the same marble. Such a model, if successful, secures divine unicity, but not divine simplicity, since there are in God three non-identical persons and thus complexity. Hughes argues that Aquinas' attempt to have a God who is at once Triune and free from composition is "fundamentally incoherent" (Hughes, 188) because in order to maintain simplicity he has to deny that if $x=z$ and $y=z$, then $x=y$. Otherwise he yields the palm of victory to the Arians, Muslims, and Jews. If we say with the Reformed theologians that God is one individual who has three modes of subsisting, which are really distinct from one another and from God, then we have sacrificed divine simplicity. In short, "The full strength account of divine simplicity describes a God who could not possibly be Triune" (Hughes, 240).

sobering – that historically some of the most prominent proponents of divine simplicity, including Arian, Muslim, and Jewish thinkers, have rejected the doctrine of the Trinity precisely on the basis of divine simplicity.[268] Eunomius, ibn Sīnā, and Maimonides all repudiate the doctrine of the Trinity as obviously incompatible with a strong doctrine of divine simplicity.[269]

Although we reserve a discussion of the Trinity for later, we may note in passing that the problem of reconciling (DS+) with Trinitarian theism is, indeed, obvious and acute for Christian proponents of divine simplicity. On a social Trinitarianism, such as the Cappadocian Fathers propounded, which emphasizes the three self-conscious persons of the Godhead, God cannot be utterly simple, as the Cappadocians themselves realized, for the divine nature and the divine persons are distinct. On a Thomistic model of the Trinity, which reduces the divine persons to subsistent relations, there remains no explanation even within the medieval metaphysical framework of how God can be simple, since the relevant relations are regarded as real relations, not merely conceptually drawn relations. When Reformed scholastics claim that the simple divine essence subsists in three distinct modes that are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then absent any explanation on their part of how this differs from modalism or tri-theism, we seem to have once again the substitution of empty jargon for conceptual analysis.[270] In any case an individual which exists in three distinct modes can hardly be called simple.[271]

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[268] For a brief account of Muslim and Jewish deployment of arguments for divine simplicity as "weapons in a battle against the doctrine of the Trinity," see Burns, "Divine Simplicity," 286–288.

[269] For example, Maimonides complains, "Those who believe that God is One, and that he has many attributes, declare the unity with their lips, and assume plurality in their thoughts. This is like the doctrine of the Christians, who say that he is one and he is three, and that the three are one. Of the same character is the doctrine of those who say that God is One, but that he has many attributes" (*Guide for the Perplexed* I.50).

[270] I have, for example, no idea what Duby means when he says, "Each person of the Trinity is a *subsistentia* or *modus subsistendi* of the divine essence or of the one God. . . . In this discussion, a mode. . . is a transcendental deportment, determination or ordering of that of which it is a mode (i.e., God or the divine essence)" (Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 227–229). When Duby affirms that "Since the persons as *modi subsistendi* are really identical with the one God and nevertheless objectively distinct from one another, it follows that they are not really or essentially but rather modally and relatively distinct from one another" (Duby, 228), he seems to land in the logical impasse noted by Hughes of saying, for example, that the Father = the divine essence and the Son = the divine essence, but the Father ≠ the Son. This flouts the principle of identity.

[271] See discussion by Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1: 278–282. He maintains:

> "The persons are manifestly distinct from the essence because the essence is one only, while the persons are three. The former is absolute, the latter are relative; the former is communicable. . . , the latter are incommunicable; the former is a something broader and the latter are narrower. . . . it is broader than each one of them because each person has indeed the whole divinity, but not adequately and totally (if it is right so to speak), i.e., not to the exclusion of the others because it is still communicable to more (278)".

Therefore, "We are necessitated to say that the mode of subsisting in the divinity superadds something positive to the unity of the divine essence" (280). It seems impossible to maintain divine simplicity on such a view, for while God's essence may be simple, God is not, for he must have non-accidental personal properties in addition to his essence.

Contemporary defenses of the doctrine of the Trinity aspire to provide models of the Trinity that are both coherent and plausible. But such models do not in general aspire to demonstrate the compatibility of the doctrine of the Trinity with a strong doctrine of divine simplicity.

5.5 Concluding Remarks

Tongue in cheek, Thomas Morris observes, "more than one newcomer to the field of philosophical theology, wading through the logical and metaphysical tangles of the doctrine [of divine simplicity], has been heard to remark, 'If this is divine simplicity, I don't want to know about divine complexity'"![272] In the course of our convoluted discussion, we have seen that there really is no single doctrine of divine simplicity that has been historically affirmed by Christian theologians. Rather various doctrines differing in strength have been enunciated. While the Scripture supports a thin doctrine of divine simplicity such as (DS_{1-3}), a doctrine such as (DS+), whose roots are to be found in Neo-Platonism, is not only unbiblical but is in various respects incompatible with the teaching of Scripture. Moreover, the arguments of perfect being theology, derived principally from considerations of divine perfection and aseity, do not go to support any doctrine of divine simplicity so strong as (DS+). Finally, we have seen that there are formidable objections to such claims as that God's essence is existence, that God is not distinct from his properties, that God is pure actuality, and that the triune God is simple.[273]

Nonetheless, I have argued that if we reject constituent ontologies, taking an anti-realist attitude toward properties, as seems plausible, then the Christian theologian may affirm without qualms that God is no more metaphysically composed than anything else. Accordingly, we should affirm a weak doctrine of divine simplicity, which we may characterize as follows:

> (DS_4) As a spiritual substance, God is not composed of separable parts; neither does he have metaphysical constituents.[274]

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[272] Thomas V. Morris, review of *Divine Simplicity*, by F. G. Immink, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 56, no. 33 (1988): 579.

[273] Ross Inman's edited volume *Contemplating Divine Simplicity: Five Views from Philosophy and Theology* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, forthcoming), featuring Katherin Rogers, W. Matthews Grant, Joshua Blander, Oliver Crisp, and R. T. Mullins, appeared too late for me to take cognizance of it. Fortunately we have interacted with the previously published views of many of these authors in this section.

[274] I am grateful to Lloyd Gerson, Christopher Hughes, Brian Leftow, Jon McGinnis, Ryan Mullins, Gavin Ortlund, John Waldrop, and Thomas Williams for discussion of issues raised in this section.

6
Omniscience

Omniscience is one of the traditional attributes of God that enjoys the strong support of both biblical and perfect being theology.

6.1 Biblical Data Concerning Divine Omniscience

The Scriptures teach that God is all-knowing. Isaiah declares that "his understanding is unsearchable" (Is 40.28), and the psalmist similarly proclaims that "his understanding is beyond measure" (Ps 147.5). Both the prophet and the psalmist thereby indicate that the extent of God's knowledge is inexhaustible and limitless. In the same way, the psalmist ponders the infinite extent of God's knowledge, singing,

> How precious to me are thy thoughts, O God!
> How vast is the sum of them!
> If I would count them, they are more than the sand.
> When I awake, I am still with thee. (Ps 139.17–18)

No finite number can serve to enumerate what God knows; his knowledge is infinite. The sense of the final line of v.18 is that it is impossible to come to the end of God's knowledge. No matter how far the psalmist should count, even should he fall asleep wearied from his meditation, still, upon his awaking, the infinite expanse of God's knowledge would stretch away before him.

Systematic Philosophical Theology: On God: Attributes of God, Volume IIa, First Edition.
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6.1.1 God's Knowledge of the Present

Taken in isolation, the assertions of the prophet and psalmist might be interpreted as religious hyperbole; but the OT and NT consistently portray God as the one who knows everything, including all things present, past, and future. With regard to things present, nothing escapes the knowledge of God, who is often described as observing everything that goes on in his creation: "For he looks to the ends of the earth, and sees everything under the heavens" (Job 28.24). His knowledge ranges from the greatest to the most insignificant aspects of creation. On the one hand, he knows the number and nature of the stars (Ps 147.4; Job 38.31–33; Is 40.26). On the other hand, Jesus taught that not a single sparrow dies without God's knowledge and that the very hairs of our heads are numbered (Mt 10.29–39).

But God does not merely observe what goes on in the created order; he *understands* it. God's answer to Job out of the whirlwind (Job 38–41) is a magnificent description of God's knowledge of the creation's profoundest secrets. "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" the LORD challenges Job, and then he proceeds to interrogate him concerning the wonders of the universe. Job's mouth is stopped; he can only answer, "I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (Job 42.3). In contrast to human ignorance, God's wisdom and understanding encompass the entire created order (Job 28.12–27).

God's knowledge of creation includes knowledge of all human affairs. The Scriptures repeatedly tell us that God's eyes observe all the ways and acts of a man (Job 24.23; 31.4; 34.21; Ps 119.168; Jer 16.17; 32.19; cf. Ps 14.2; II Chr 16.9). God does not, however, observe merely our *actions,* but in one of the most startling affirmations pertinent to divine omniscience, we are told that God knows our very *thoughts*. One of Jeremiah's characteristic emphases, for example, is that God discerns and weighs human hearts and minds:

> "I the LORD search the mind
> and try the heart,
> to give to every man according to his ways,
> according to the fruit of his doings." (Jer 17.9–10)

In the Hebrew idiom the heart denotes the center of the human personality in all its spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and ethical aspects. That God knows even this inner sanctum of human beings is a characteristic theme in OT religion. The LORD says to Samuel, "The LORD sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart"

(1 Sam 16.7). David instructs Solomon that "the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every plan and thought" (I Chr 28.9). Solomon prays, "Render to each whose heart thou knowest, according to all his ways (for thou, thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men) (I Kg 8.39). The metaphor of sight also applies to God's knowledge of human hearts and thoughts: God "sees the heart and the mind" and so judges us (Jer 20.12). Even as nothing happening in the physical world escapes his notice, so no secret thought or inner motive remains unknown to him.

The NT likewise insists on God's knowledge of the heart (Acts 1.24; 15.8; Rom 8.27; II Cor 4.5; I Jn 3.19–20). The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews splendidly summarizes the biblical conviction concerning God's intimate knowledge of our inner thoughts:

> For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. (Heb 4.12–13)

Thus the minds of individuals as well as their actions lie naked before the all-knowing God.

6.1.2 God's Knowledge of the Past

If God so knows the present, it scarcely needs to be said that God also knows completely the past. He is eternal and created the universe by his wisdom (Ps 90.2; Prov 8.22–31). Since every moment of the past was once present and God knows all things happening in the present, the only way in which his knowledge of the past might be incomplete would be for him to forget something. But such a lapse of memory is foreign to the biblical God. One finds little reference to God's memory in the Scriptures simply because the notion of his having known something but then forgotten it is inconceivable. True, he is said to remember no longer the sins of those who turn to him in repentance and faith (Is 43.25; Jer 31.34), but this is clearly a reference to his forgiving sins, not to a literal extinguishing of memory on God's part. Indeed, when the concepts of remembering and forgetting are used with respect to God, they usually have to do with the notion of God's faithfulness to his people or covenant (Ex 2.24; Dt 4.31; Ps 98.3) and the faithlessness of Israel to God (I Sam 12.9; Is 17.10; Jer 2.32; Hos 4.6). God remembers his people, though they consistently forget him. When prayers are offered that God remember some deed of the wicked and exact vengeance or remember some affliction and bring comfort, the petition is not

that he merely retain some fact, but that he make and keep it an object of concern. It is in this sense that Jesus says that the fifth sparrow thrown in for the price of four is not forgotten before God (Lk 12.6).

Of course, to maintain something as an object of concern, one must remember it, and the Scriptures have no doubt about God's mental capacity in this regard. Job says that God numbers all his steps (Job 31.4). The psalmist in affliction comforts himself by praying,

> Thou hast kept count of my tossings;
> put thou my tears in thy bottle!
> Are they not in thy book? (Ps 56.8)

God has, as it were, a book of remembrance (Mal 3.16) in which every tossing and tear of his afflicted servant is recorded. Of course, the language is poetical, but the Scriptures implicitly assume that just as God sees everything that happens, he remembers everything that has happened and every fact that he has known.

6.1.3 God's Knowledge of the Future

Finally, more controversially, Scripture affirms that God possesses complete knowledge of the future.

6.1.3.1 Importance of Divine Foreknowledge

Two biblical motifs underscore the importance of divine foreknowledge. First, God's knowledge of the future appears to underlie the biblical scheme of history and divine providence. For the biblical conception of history is not that of an unpredictably unfolding sequence of events plunging haphazardly without purpose or direction; rather God knows the future and sovereignly directs the course of world history toward his foreseen ends.

> I am God, and there is none like me,
> declaring the end from the beginning
> and from ancient times things not yet done,
> saying, "My counsel shall stand,
> and I will accomplish all my purpose." (Is 46.9–10)

Again Isaiah proclaims,

> Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel
> and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:

> "I am the first and I am the last;
> besides me there is no god.
> Who is like me? Let him proclaim it,
> let him declare and set it forth before me.
> Who has announced from of old the things to come?
> Let them tell us what is yet to be.
> Fear not, nor be afraid;
> have I not told you from of old and declared it?
> And you are my witnesses!
> Is there a God besides me?
> There is no Rock; I know not any." (Is 44.6–8)

In the vision of John in the book of Revelation, some of these same words are ascribed to the exalted Christ (Rev 1.17; 22.13). Biblical history is a salvation history, and Christ is the beginning, centerpiece, and culmination of that history. God's salvific plan was not an afterthought necessitated by an unforeseen circumstance. Paul speaks of "the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things," "a plan for the fulness of time" according to "the eternal purpose which he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph 3.9; 1.10; 3.11; cf. II Timothy 1.9–10). Similarly, Peter states that Christ "was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake" (I Pet 1.20). God's knowledge of the course of world history and his control over it to achieve his purposes seem fundamental to the biblical conception of history and are a source of comfort and assurance to the believer in times of distress.

Second, God's knowledge of the future seems essential to the prophetic pattern that underlines the biblical scheme of history. The test of the true prophet was success in foretelling the future: "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word which the LORD has not spoken" (Dt 18.22). The history of Israel was punctuated with prophets who foretold events in both the immediate and distant future, and it is the conviction of the NT writers that the coming and work of Jesus had been prophesied. Jesus himself is characterized as a prophet, and he predicts the destruction of Jerusalem, signs of the end of the world, and his own return as Lord of all nations (Mt 24; Mk 13; Lk 21). The prophetic pattern thus reveals an underlying unity, not only between the two testaments, but beneath the entire course of human history.

The biblical view of history and prophecy thus seems to necessitate a God who knows not only the present and past, but also the future. Indeed, so essential is God's knowledge of the future that Isaiah makes knowledge

of the future the decisive test in distinguishing the true God from false gods. The prophet flings this challenge in the teeth of all pretenders to deity:

> Set forth your case, says the LORD;
> bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob.
> Let them bring them, and tell us what is to happen.
> Tell us the former things, what they are,
> that we may consider them,
> that we may know their outcome;
> or declare to us the things to come.
> Tell us what is to come hereafter,
> that we may know that you are gods;
> do good, or do harm,
> that we may be dismayed and terrified.
> Behold, you are nothing,
> and your work is nought;
> an abomination is he who chooses you. (Is 41.21–24)

Thus the God of Israel was conceived to possess foreknowledge of the future, a property which distinguished him from all false gods.

6.1.3.2 God's Knowledge of Future Contingents

Even more remarkably, just as God knows the thoughts humans have, so he foreknows the very thoughts they will have. The psalmist declares,

> O LORD, thou hast searched me and known me!
> Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up;
> thou discernest my thoughts from afar.
> Thou searchest out my path and my lying down,
> and art acquainted with all my ways.
> Even before a word is on my tongue,
> lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.
> Thou dost beset me behind and before,
> and layest thy hand upon me.
> Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
> it is high, I cannot attain it. (Ps 139.1–6)

Here the psalmist envisages himself as surrounded by God's knowledge. God knows everything about him, even his thoughts. "From afar" (*mērāhôq*) may be taken to indicate temporal distance – God knows the psalmist's thoughts long before he thinks them. Similarly, even before he speaks a word, God knows what he will say. Little wonder that such knowledge is beyond the reach of the psalmist's understanding! But such is the knowledge of Israel's God in contradistinction to all the false gods of her neighbors.

One of the contributions of the NT to the doctrine of divine foreknowledge is its introduction of a family of words associated with God's knowledge of the future, such as "foreknow" (*proginōskō*), "foreknowledge" (*prognōsis*), "foresee" (*prooraō*), "foreordain" (*proorizō*), and "foretell" (*promarturomai*, *prokatangellō*). In many cases, the *pro*-words clearly have to do with foreknowledge, -sight, -ordination, or -telling. For example, the OT prophets by the Spirit of Christ foretold (*promarturomai)* the sufferings and exaltation of Christ (I Pet 1.11). Similarly, in Peter's second sermon in Acts we find, "But what God foretold [*prokatangellō*] by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled" (Acts 3.18); and again in Stephen's speech, "Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand [*prokatangellō*] the coming of the Righteous One" (Acts 7.52). The prophet's ability to foretell the future is rooted in God's foresight or foreknowledge. Paul states, "The scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand [*proeuangelizomai*] to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed'" (Gal 3.8). Of course, the Scripture itself did not say this to Abraham, but God did, and Scripture records the fact; nor does the Scripture foresee the future, but the God who inspired Scripture does. Paul's meaning, then, is that God, foreseeing that he would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel of justification by faith to Abraham in advance.

Both God's foresight and foreknowledge are referred to in Luke's rendition of Peter's sermon on Pentecost. Peter proclaims, "This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2.23). Then citing Ps 16.8–11, in which David says, "I saw the LORD always before me [*prooraō*]" Peter comments, "Being therefore a prophet, . . . he foresaw [*prooraō*] and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ" (Acts 2.25, 30–31). The meaning of v. 23 seems to be that Jesus' being handed over to the Jewish and Roman authorities was not accidental or unexpected but was in accord with God's decided purpose and foreknowledge of what would happen. This interpretation is reinforced by the wordplay on David's foreseeing the Lord, which is taken to apply to his foreseeing Messiah's resurrection.

A similar thought is expressed in I Pet 1.19–20, where the writer explains that we have been redeemed "by the precious blood . . . of Christ, foreknown [*proginōskō*] before the foundation of the world but revealed in the last times for your sake." *Proginōskō* in I Pet 1.19–20 is often taken to mean "predestine," but it is noteworthy that Peter does not use *proorizō* here, which could convey that meaning, but *proginōskō,* which means simply "foreknow." There is no linguistic evidence, biblical or extrabiblical, that these words can be used as synonyms.

It is true that in Acts 4.28 Luke does speak in terms of foreordination. Herod and Pilate, together with the Gentiles and Jews, were gathered together against Jesus "to do whatever your hand and your plan foreordained [*proorizō*] to happen" (my translation). But from these passages we cannot be sure that foreknowledge is based on foreordination rather than the reverse. God's foreordination could be based on his knowledge of what Herod, Pilate, and the others would do, should Christ be sent. Technically, this is not foreknowledge, but middle knowledge, which we shall discuss in the sequel; that is to say, it is *prognōsis* in the sense that God knew in advance what would happen were he to send his Son. For the moment, however, the essential point is that foreknowledge and foreordination do not mean the same thing, and the latter could be based on the former rather than vice versa.

A second contribution of the NT concerning foreknowledge is its attribution of such knowledge to Christ himself. All the Gospels represent Jesus as possessing foreknowledge of various future contingent events. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, he foretells his passion, death, and resurrection (Mk 8.31; 9.31; 10.32–34, and parallels). In Mark 13 and 14 Jesus exhibits an amazing knowledge of future events both imminent and distant. When his disciples ask about the times and signs of the destruction of the temple, an event which he had predicted, Jesus expounds at length in his Olivet discourse the course of the last days prior to his return (Mk 13 and parallels; see also Lk 17.22–37). During the Passover meal, Jesus foretells his betrayal by Judas (Mk 14.18–20 and parallels). Then after the supper, he predicts the disciples' abandoning him and the threefold denial of Peter (Mk 14.27–30 and parallels) – predictions which are soon tragically fulfilled.

To suggest that these last predictions were not founded on foreknowledge, but were inferences based on the character of the disciples and the context of events soon to occur, is to evacuate the incidents of all theological significance whatever. These events were remembered by the early church because they taught something about the Lord, namely, his mastery over and full awareness of all he was to undergo; but if these predictions were just inferences, then Jesus' giving them is devoid of significance. Our interest is not in whether Jesus actually gave true prophecies of the future; rather the point is that he is represented as possessing the same sort of foreknowledge as is ascribed in the OT to Yahweh. The theology of the first three gospels clearly presents Jesus as foreknowing events which were beyond the capacity of any human inference. It was this claim to superhuman knowledge which was the butt of the cruel mockery at Jesus' trial when the guards blindfolded

him, struck him in the face, and cried, "Prophesy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?" (Mt 26.68).

The Gospel of John likewise portrays Jesus as foreknowing future events. John seems to underline Jesus' clairvoyant and precognitive knowledge. Nathanael believes in Christ because of Jesus' knowledge of him without any personal contact (Jn 1.47–50). Knowing what is in people who believe in him because of his miracles, Jesus does not trust himself to them (2.24–25). Jesus tells Nicodemus that the Son of man possesses knowledge of heavenly as well as earthly things (3.10–12). He is able to disclose the private life of a woman of Samaria whom he had never met before (4.17–29, 29). Some of his questions to the disciples are merely to test them, for he already knows the answer (6.6). He knows who among his followers do not truly believe in him, and he knows who will betray him (6.64). Jesus knows his heavenly origin and his eventual return to God through death and resurrection (7.33; 8.14, 21–28; 12.32–33; 13.3). The stories of Jesus' predictions of Judas' betrayal and Peter's threefold denial are narrated (13.21–27, 36–38). Jesus predicts the immediate scattering of his disciples (16.32) and their later expulsion from the synagogues (16.1–4). John emphasizes that Jesus foretells such things so that when his predictions are fulfilled, the disciples may be confirmed in their faith (13.19; 14.29; 16.4; cf. 2.22). In John's mind Jesus' supernatural knowledge is an unmistakable sign of his divine origin and mission.

Thus, in the NT as well as the OT, God is conceived as knowing not only all present and past events, but future events as well. This foreknowledge seems to extend to future free acts, events which could not possibly be inferred from present causes and which in any case are not so represented by the biblical authors. We have seen examples throughout Scripture of God's foreknowledge of such events, including even the thoughts which individuals will have. Therefore, in the biblical conception God's knowledge comprises foreknowledge of future contingents.

Moreover, as previously mentioned, the Scriptures make it clear that God also has knowledge of conditional future contingents, that is to say, he knows what would happen if human beings were to make some free choice in a particular set of circumstances. Such knowledge is even more remarkable than simple foreknowledge, for in the case of foreknowledge the events foreknown actually do happen, whereas in the case of such hypothetical knowledge, God knows certain subjunctive conditionals about what people would freely do under various circumstances whether the events ever happen or not. One of the classic examples of such knowledge on God's part is found in I Sam 23.6–10, which tells of David's inquiry of the LORD by means of a divining device called an ephod. David asks the LORD whether Saul will attack the city

of Keilah, where David is holed up, and whether the men of Keilah will deliver David over to Saul. In both cases, the device (which apparently gave either a "yes" or "no" answer) registers an affirmative response, whereupon David flees the city, so that the predictions do not in fact come true. What the device had mediated to David was not, therefore, simple foreknowledge, but hypothetical knowledge. God was letting David know that if he *were* to remain at Keilah, then Saul *would* come after him and that if Saul *were* to come after David, then the men of Keilah *would* deliver him over to Saul. By acting on such knowledge, David was able to save his life and those of his men. The answers given by the divining device were thus correct answers, even though the events did not come to pass, since the answers were indicative of what would happen under certain circumstances.

Although most Scriptural prophecy is given in an unconditional way, sometimes prophecies are provided explicitly in the conditional form that David received at Keilah (e.g., Jer 38.17–18). Indeed, construing certain prophecies as hypothetical warnings rather than as categorical declarations of simple foreknowledge enables us to explain how it is that in Israel the test of a true prophet was the fulfillment of his predictions (Dt 18.22) and yet some predictions given by true prophets do not actually come to pass due a change on the part of the people forewarned (Amos 7.1–6; Jon 3; Isa 38.1–5). In such cases, what God was giving was hypothetical knowledge of what would happen under the prevailing circumstances; but were intercessory prayer or repentance to occur, then God would not carry out what had been threatened.

We also find this sort of hypothetical knowledge exhibited by Christ. For example, he tells Peter, "Go to the sea and cast a hook, and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth, you will find a shekel; take that and give it to them for me and for yourself" (Mt 17.27). The passage is most naturally understood as an expression of Jesus' knowledge that if Peter were to carry out Jesus' instructions he would find things as the Lord predicted. Sometimes Jesus makes such subjunctive conditional statements himself: "If my Kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews" (Jn 18.36). Examples of this sort could be multiplied.

It is plain, then, that the God of the Bible exhibits knowledge of conditional future contingents. Given God's infallibility, it will not do to construe these examples as mere hunches on God's part. If God believes that Saul would besiege Keilah if David were to remain there, then that subjunctive conditional statement is known by God to be true.

In sum, on the basis of our examination of the biblical text we have found strong *prima facie* warrant for the doctrine that God's omniscience

encompasses all events, including knowledge of all absolute and conditional future contingents.

6.1.3.3 Two Denials of God's Knowledge of Future Contingents

The claim that the biblical God knows future contingents, not to speak of conditional future contingents, is nonetheless disputed. Two sorts of denial of this doctrine have been issued: (1) denial that God has foreknowledge of such events, and (2) denial that there are any truly free human acts. The first affirms that some acts are free but denies that God foreknows them, while the second affirms that God completely foreknows the future but denies that there are any free acts of men for God to foreknow. Let us examine each of these views in turn.

6.1.3.3.1 Denial of Divine Foreknowledge

According to the first denial, the Bible does not teach that God has complete knowledge of the future. Revisionist theologians maintain that God can make only intelligent conjectures about what free persons are going to do. Indeed, he is ignorant of vast stretches of forthcoming history, since even a single significant human choice could turn history in a different direction, and subsequent events would, as time goes on, be increasingly different from his expectations. At best God can be said to have a good idea of what will happen only in the near future.

By way of scriptural justification of their view, revisionists typically point to passages in Scripture in which God is depicted as ignorant of some fact. For example, when he appeared to Abraham, God said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry which has come to me; and if not, I will know" (Gen 18.20–21). In other cases, God seems unsure of how people will react to his prophetic messages. For example, God commands Jeremiah to prophesy to the cities of Judah and adds, "It may be they will listen, and every one turn from his evil way, that I may repent of the evil which I intend to do to them because of their evil doings" (Jer 26.3). Later God says to his prophet, "It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I intend to do to them, so that every one may turn from his evil way, and that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin" (Jer 36.3). Similarly, in commanding Ezekiel to perform a prophetic sign, God says, "Perhaps they will understand, though they are a rebellious house" (Ez 12.3). God here seems as ignorant about the future free reactions of the people as are the prophets themselves.

Now certainly there are scriptural passages which, taken at face value, seem to imply God's ignorance of certain facts; the whole question is whether we should take such passages at face value. Here two problems arise.

First, a consistent application of this way of interpreting the Bible leads to a defective concept of God. For not only are there biblical passages implying God's ignorance of future events but also of present and past events. In the case of the LORD's appearing in human form to Abraham, taking Gen 18.20–21 literally denies to God not foreknowledge, but knowledge of what has been and is presently going on (cf. Gen 11.5). But certainly the biblical God has such knowledge; in fact, in the same chapter God displays clairvoyant knowledge of the present (Gen 18.12–15). Thus, a consistent application of this naïve hermeneutic would lead to a cognitively limited deity who is ignorant not only of the future but also the past and present, in contradiction to biblical teaching.

Even worse, it is striking how similar this naïve literalism is to that of Mormon theologians, who employ it to justify their belief in a God who is not only ignorant of future contingents but is a physical being with human form spatially located somewhere in the universe. LDS (Latter Day Saints) theologians insist on taking the biblical descriptions of God at face value and going no further. Revisionist theologians would doubtless respond that these anthropomorphic descriptions must be taken as metaphors, since we have other passages in Scripture asserting the spirituality and omnipresence of God. But what is awkward for revisionist theologians is that there are far more biblical passages implying divine corporeality than divine ignorance of future contingents and fewer passages affirming divine incorporeality than divine foreknowledge. It is difficult to see how one can adopt revisionist theologians' naive literalism with respect to divine knowledge and yet reject it with respect to divine corporeality. LDS theologians realize this and have therefore warmly embraced revisionist theologians.

That leads to the second point. The fundamental flaw of this naïve hermeneutic is its failure to appreciate that the Bible is not a textbook in systematic theology or philosophy of religion but is largely a collection of *stories* about God's dealings with men. These stories are told from the human perspective and evince all the liveliness of the storyteller's art. The storyteller's task is not to reflect philosophically upon his narrative but to tell a vivid tale. Thus, the Scriptures are filled with anthropomorphisms, many so subtle that they escape our notice. There are not only the obvious anthropomorphisms, such as references to God's eyes, hands, and nostrils, but almost unconscious anthropomorphisms, such as references to God's seeing the distress of his people, hearing their prayers, crushing his enemies, turning away from apostate Israel, and so forth. These are

all metaphors, since God does not possess literal bodily parts by which to accomplish these actions. In the same way, given the explicit teaching of Scripture that God foreknows the future, the passages which portray God as ignorant or inquiring are plausibly to be understood as anthropomorphisms characteristic of the genre of narrative.

As for the prophecies in which God states that perhaps the people will repent, this comment need not be an expression of ignorance on God's part, but rather an assurance to the listeners that it is not too late for them to change and avert disaster. As Jeremiah says, "Now therefore amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God, and the LORD will repent of the evil which he has pronounced against you" (Jer 26.13). There is no implication that God did not know how the people would react. On the contrary, God seemed to know all too well in Ezekiel's case that the people would not respond, but God insisted that his prophet faithfully proclaim the message whether the people listened or not (Ez 2.5, 7; 33.31–33). Similarly, in the prophecy of Isaiah it is evident that God foreknew all along that Israel would not respond: "For I knew that you would deal very treacherously, and that from birth you were called a rebel" (Is 48.8).

Revisionist theologians also appeal to passages in which God predicts that something will happen, but then repents, so that the predicted event does not come to pass (Amos 7.1–6; Jon 3; Is 38.1–5). Obviously, since what God predicted did not in the end happen, the predictions did not represent foreknowledge of the future. Our problem here is to explain how it is that while the authors of these passages were aware that God knew the future and could not lie (Num 23.19; I Sam 15.29), yet they represent him as relenting on impending judgements which he had commanded his prophets to proclaim.

The most plausible interpretation of such passages is that the prophecies contained implicit *ceteris paribus* conditions. These prophecies were not simple glimpses of the future, but pictures of what was going to happen *unless*. . . . Prophecies with such conditions are not unusual in the OT. One thinks of Abraham's intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18.16–32), Abraham and Isaac at Moriah (Gen 22.1–14), or David's fasting for his dying son (II Sam 12.14–23). David later recalled the reasoning behind his fasting even though the boy's death was prophesied: "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' " (II Sam 12.22; cf. Jon 3.9). Thus the reaction of Hezekiah, Amos, and the people of Nineveh was entirely appropriate: one simply did not know whether the prophecy contained *ceteris paribus* conditions that made it possible to avert disaster.

Sometimes such conditions might be explicit, as they were in Jeremiah's prophecy to King Zedekiah:

> Thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel, If you will surrender to the princes of the king of Babylon, then your life shall be spared, and this city shall not be burned with fire, and you and your house shall live. But if you do not surrender. . . , then this city shall be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and you shall not escape from their hand. (Jer 38.17–18)

This passage illustrates human freedom within God's sovereign control but does not imply that God did not foreknow the choice which Zedekiah would make. Rather, opportunity was being left for the king to avert impending disaster. As the LORD later declared through the prophet Ezekiel, "Though I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' yet if he turns from his sin and does what is lawful and right, . . . he shall surely live, he shall not die" (Ez 33.14–15).

If our argument is correct, then certain prophecies do not represent bits of foreknowledge, but rather are forecasts or forewarnings of what is going to happen if all things remain as they are. But not all of the prophecies in the OT and NT are like this. Prophecies of events which could not have been inferred from present causes and which were brought about not by God himself but by human beings cannot be interpreted as forewarnings but must be considered to express genuine foreknowledge on God's part. Moreover, even if the problematic passages considered thus far are not anthropomorphisms or conditional forewarnings, they still do not serve to overturn the clear teaching of Scripture elsewhere that God does foreknow the future free acts of individuals. One still could not deny that the Scriptures in their most exalted and thoughtful vision of God portray him as knowing even future free acts.

How do the detractors of divine foreknowledge explain these passages? Typically, they attempt to dismiss each example of divine foreknowledge in Scripture as being one of the following:

1. a declaration by God of what he himself intends to bring about;
2. an inference of what is going to happen based on present causes;
3. a conditional prediction of what will happen *if* something else happens.

Such an account seems inadequate, however. As far as (3) is concerned, conditional predictions, if they do not reduce to (1) or (2), must be expressions of divine middle knowledge (to be discussed below), which is even more remarkable than divine foreknowledge and, indeed, may provide the

basis for divine foreknowledge. Hence, to try to explain away divine foreknowledge by means of (3) is counterproductive.

As for (2), while it might be claimed, say, that Jesus predicted Judas' betrayal or Peter's denial solely on the basis of their character and the surrounding circumstances,[1] there can be no question that the Gospel writers themselves did not so understand such predictions. To try to explain biblical prophecies as mere inferences from present states of affairs denudes them of any theological significance. The writers of Scripture clearly saw prophecy not as God's reasoned conjecture of what will happen, but as a manifestation of his infinite knowledge, encompassing even things yet to come.

As for (1), many prophecies in Scripture are, indeed, clearly based on God's irrevocable intention to bring about certain future events on his own (Is 48.3). In such cases, prophecy serves to manifest not so much God's omniscience as his omnipotence, his ability to bring about whatever he intends. But the problem with (1) is that it simply cannot be stretched to cover all the cases. Remember, the option now under discussion holds that many human actions are not determined by prior causes. Divine foreknowledge of such actions cannot be accounted for by (1), since it negates libertarian freedom. Explanation (1) is useful only in accounting for God's knowledge of events which he himself will bring about. But the Scripture provides many examples of divine foreknowledge of events which God does not directly cause, events which are the result of free human choices. And even in prophecies concerning God's own actions, foreknowledge of free human acts is sometimes presupposed. For example, when God speaks of using Cyrus to subdue the nations (Is 44.28–45.1), God's intention presupposes his foreknowledge that such a person shall in fact come to exist at the proper time and place and be in a position to serve as God's instrument. To respond that God brings about all these details as well would be to deny the very human freedom which the view we are discussing wants to affirm.

Finally, none of the three explanations comes to grips with the Scriptures' doctrinal teaching concerning God's foreknowledge. These explanations try to account only for examples of prophecy in the Bible and say nothing about the didactic passages which explicitly teach that God foreknows the future.

In summary, the first denial of the biblical doctrine of divine foreknowledge is not very plausible. Passages attributing ignorance to God are clearly anthropomorphic. Passages speaking of God's repenting have to do with forewarnings which include the implicit condition "all things remaining the same." In any case, such passages do not negate the fact that in many

[1] But *three* times before the cock crows *twice*?

other passages Scripture affirms divine foreknowledge of future free acts. Attempts to explain away all the prophecies of Scripture without recourse to foreknowledge are inadequate and do not in any case address the didactic portions of Scripture that explicitly teach divine foreknowledge. Hence we may conclude that, given that certain human actions are freely chosen, divine foreknowledge of such actions cannot be biblically denied.

6.1.3.3.2 Denial of Human Freedom

According to the second denial of the doctrine that God foreknows future contingents, God does foreknow all future events, including human choices and actions, but only because none of them is free in a libertarian sense. Rather they are divinely determined to occur. Jewish religion had a strong sense of God's sovereignty, and there is a stream of texts running though Scripture which imply that literally everything that happens is ordained by God to happen. Hence it might be said that God foreknows the future because he foreordains everything that will occur. While too numerous to list, the texts which support this view have been collected by D. A. Carson under four main headings: (1) God is the Creator, Ruler, and Possessor of all things; (2) God is the ultimate personal cause of all that happens; (3) God elects his people; and (4) God is the unacknowledged source of good fortune or success.[2]

This presents only half the picture, however. For the conviction that human beings are free moral agents also permeates the Hebrew way of thinking; there is no hint of a determinism which would reduce humans to mere puppets. Throughout the Scriptures are texts which seem to presuppose genuine human freedom before God. Carson lists them under nine heads: (1) people face a multitude of divine exhortations and commands; (2) people are said to obey, believe, and choose God; (3) people sin and rebel against God; (4) people's sins are judged by God; (5) people are tested by God; (6) people receive divine rewards; (7) the elect are responsible to respond to God's initiative; (8) prayers are not mere showpieces scripted by God; and (9) God literally pleads with sinners to repent and be saved.[3] These texts suggest a great measure of human freedom in our intercourse with God.

Perhaps one of the most striking indications of this freedom is the passages which speak of God's repenting (e.g., Gen 6.6; I Sam 15.11, 35). It is not clear to what extent the proponents of the view that foreknowledge is

[2] D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension*, New Foundations Theological Library (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 24–35.
[3] Carson, 18–22.

invariably the consequence of foreordination can plausibly explain away these texts as pure anthropomorphisms. Such thinkers might interpret these passages as teaching that when individuals continue in sin, they will be judged, but God will forgive them if they repent. The change, then, is on the individuals' part, not God's.[4] But even this minimal understanding underscores that God's sovereignty is not a blind force acting irrespective of human actions, but is contingent in certain cases upon human decisions.

Moreover, it does not seem that all predictions or instances of foreknowledge in the Scriptures can be explained in terms of foreordination. For there are instances of foreknowledge of events which God does not bring about. For example, we have seen that God foreknows our thoughts; any attempt to reduce such foreknowledge to foreordination would seem to lead to the sort of determinism which Jewish thought rejects.

Furthermore, we have seen numerous instances of God's foreknowledge of future sinful acts – can these acts be ascribed to God's foreordination? Carson claims that the OT writers do not shy away from making God himself in some mysterious way the cause of many evils (Gen 50.20; Jdg 9.23; I Sam 16.14; II Sam 24.1; 1 Kg 22.19–22; Job 1.6–12; Amos 3.6).[5] But he admits that most of these references concern God's judgement on sin; in the remaining cases of Joseph and Job it seems plausible that God permits some evil in order to bring about a greater good. Carson also acknowledges that there is in Scripture a sort of asymmetry in the way in which our deeds are ascribed ultimately to God: "The manner in which God stands behind evil and the manner in which he stands behind good are not precisely identical; for he is to be praised for the good, but not blamed for the evil."[6] But if God foreordains and brings about evil thoughts and deeds, it seems impossible to give an adequate account of this biblical asymmetry. Even the most austere theologian who believes that God foreordains every action must allow human beings a certain freedom of thought and intention if God is not to be regarded as the author of sin. How to explain Adam's fall without implicating God must be particularly nettlesome for such a theologian.[7] It seems more plausible to maintain that God sovereignly permits us freedom to sin against him. The difference between his willing good and his

[4] See H. Van Dyke Parunak, "A Semantic Survey of *NḤM*," *Biblica* 56, no. 4 (1975): 512–532. According to Parunak, in passages such as Gen 6.6 and I Sam 15.11, 35, "repent" means "to suffer emotional pain." In other contexts, it may mean "to retract blessing or judgment" on the basis of a change in human conduct which has rendered the promised blessing or threatened judgement inappropriate.

[5] Carson, *Divine Sovereignty*, 29.

[6] Carson, 212.

[7] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols., ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 3:66. See further this *Systematic Philosophical Theology*, vol. III, *De homine*, pt. II, Man as Sinner.

permitting evil seems to provide a plausible basis for the biblical asymmetry that Carson notes. All good ultimately comes from God, whereas evil derives from creaturely misuse of freedom. Whatever explanation of evil one adopts, the central point here is that God's foreknowledge of evil deeds (say, Judas' betrayal or Peter's denial) cannot be accounted for on the basis that God has unilaterally determined everything that comes to pass.

Therefore, even if we allow that many of the biblical prophecies are based on foreordination, it nevertheless seems clear that God's foreknowledge of many other future events cannot be so explained. For the Bible teaches that humans are not totally determined and that in many cases what God does depends on how they freely respond to his initiatives. His foreknowledge of the future cannot be based on foreordination alone, for he foreknows our thoughts and intentions and even our sinful acts. Since God is not responsible for these human activities, it follows that he does not unilaterally causally determine them. They are therefore truly free acts, or contingents, and God's foreknowledge of them is thus foreknowledge of future contingents.

The suggestion on the part of revisionist theologians that the God described in the Bible is ignorant of future contingents is on the face of it an extraordinary claim. In our examination of the biblical text we found strong warrant for the doctrine that God's knowledge encompasses all events, including future contingents. Biblical stories suggesting the contrary are best understood as due to the non-systematic character of the narrative genre, which often employs anthropomorphic descriptions of God's person or activity. Any denial, therefore, that God knows future contingents is sub-biblical and ought to be rejected by the Christian philosophical theologian.

6.2 The Concept of Omniscience

6.2.1 Definition of "Omniscience"

What does it mean to say that God is omniscient? According to Anthony Kenny, "The doctrine of omniscience is easy to formulate precisely: it is the doctrine that for all *p*, if *p*, then God knows that *p*."[8] Kenny's definition is more accurately a definition of divine omniscience. We need a theologically neutral concept of omniscience in order to answer our question in an

[8] Anthony Kenny, *God of the Philosophers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 10.

unprejudicial way. Fortunately, Kenny's definition can be easily generalized: for any agent *S* and proposition *p*:

O_1. *S* is omniscient $=_{def}$ For all *p*, if *p*, then *S* knows that *p*.

Unfortunately, the situation does not appear to be quite as simple as Kenny asserts. For (O_1) does not exclude *S*'s also entertaining any number of false beliefs in addition to those propositions known by *S*. (O_1), then, fails to capture what is meant by "omniscience", since, if *p*, it is possible according to this definition that *S* knows that *p* is true, he knows that ~*p* is false, he knows that $p \cdot \sim p$ is necessarily false, and yet he believes ~*p* as well as *p*. Hence, Kenny's definition must be revised to:

O_2. *S* is omniscient $=_{def}$ For all *p*, if *p*, *S* knows that *p* and does not believe that ~*p*.

Omniscience so defined is clearly a great-making property, since it is greater to be knowledgeable than ignorant, and so a maximally great being must be omniscient.[9] Therefore if the property of omniscience is coherent, perfect being theology demands that the God of the Bible should be understood to be omniscient.

But is the traditional formulation adequate? Questions arise as to the nature of propositions and the extent of propositional knowledge that might call the adequacy of (O_2) into question.

(i) First, the question of variable truth values arises. Are propositions tensed or must the tense of a sentence be eliminated in order to disclose the propositional content of that sentence? How one answers that question may affect one's definition of "omniscience." If propositions are not tensed, then (O_2) seems adequate so far forth. But if propositions are tensed, then some thinkers find (O_2) problematic, since *S* must know, for example, both that

1. Socrates will drink hemlock.

and

2. Socrates will not drink hemlock.

[9] So Ben Arbour reports with respect to omniscience that "Virtually no debate exists among analytic theologians concerning the great-making status" of this attribute, "even if scholars disagree about how to properly understand" it (Benjamin H. Arbour, "Maximal Greatness and Perfect Knowledge," in *T & T Clark Handbook of Analytic Theology*, ed. James M. Arcadi and James T. Turner, Jr. [London: T & T Clark, 2021], 113–114).

since the former is true before his death and the latter is true after his death.[10] But a definition which entails that *S* knows contradictories does not express what is normally meant by "omniscience."

Defenders of tenseless propositions would suggest that this difficulty be resolved by outfitting the propositions with dates and tenseless verbs, so that both (1) and (2) express the same proposition, to wit,

3. Socrates *drinks* hemlock in 399 B.C.

But advocates of tensed propositions maintain that (3) fails to capture the full meaning of (1) or (2), since we no longer know by (3) whether Socrates' death is a past or a future event. And analyses of the temporal indexicals like "now" in terms of dates are similarly problematic, for

4. The exams are over on June 13.

does not convey the same knowledge as

5. The exams are over today!

For students do not rejoice over knowledge of (4), but they do over knowledge of (5). Hence, some have contended that in our definition of "omniscience," the truth of propositions must be relativized to a time *t:*

O_3. *S* is omniscient $=_{def}$ For all *p*, if *p* at *t*, then it is true at *t* that *S* knows that *p* and does not believe that ~*p*.

This definition would remain acceptable to advocates of tenseless propositions so long as they hold those propositions to be omnitemporally true. In fact, if we leave ambiguous whether the "knows" is tensed or tenseless, this definition is acceptable even to proponents of divine timelessness who hold a tenseless view of propositions.

But notice that (O_2) is problematic in respect to tenses and temporal indexicals only if *S* is timeless. For if *S* is temporal, he may know different propositions at different times. (O_2) would entail a contradiction only if it stated that *S* knows all propositions simultaneously; but (O_2) leaves that an open question, especially if the verbs in (O_2) are tensed. Moreover, if *S* is timeless, then so long as propositions are tenseless, (O_2) presents no difficulty. So (O_2) would be problematic only for a defender of divine timelessness who also regards propositions as tensed. So what plausible alternative to (O_2) does the atemporalist suggest?

[10] Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 25–37.

Edward Wierenga thinks that some propositions are "perspectival," true at some perspectives and false at others. With respect to tense what this amounts to is the claim that propositions have their truth values relative to times and thus sometimes change their truth values. (O_2) would require God to know all such true propositions and, hence, to be temporal and changing. But Wierenga, observing that believing that a proposition is true at a perspective is different from believing at a perspective that a proposition is true, proposes the following re-definition of omniscience:[11]

O_4. *S* is omniscient $=_{\text{def.}}$ For any proposition *p* and perspective <*s, t*>,
(i) if *p* is true at <*s, t*>, then *S* knows that *p* is true at <*s, t*>, and
(ii) if *S* is at <*s, t*> and *p* is true at <*s, t*>, then at <*s, t*>, *S* knows that *p*.

According to (O_4) God must know which tensed propositions are true at which times, but he need not know the tensed propositions themselves. Wierenga concludes, "if some propositions really do change their truth value over time, if propositions are thus 'perspectival,' then . . . an omniscient being is required to know a perspectival proposition only if the being is at a perspective at which the proposition is true"; thus, "it follows from the claim that God is omniscient that he is not eternal only on the assumption that he is at some temporal perspective. . . ."[12]

Wierenga's definition (O_4) strikes me as inadequate. In Wierenga's view, God has knowledge of propositions stating exclusively tenseless facts, such as that *p is true at t,* whereas temporal persons know a multitude of objectively true propositions which remain unknown to God. Persons located at *t* know not merely that *p is true at t*; they know *p* simpliciter, an objectively true proposition of which God is ignorant. Wierenga does not solve the problem of God's knowledge of tensed facts; he merely re-defines omniscience in such a way that a being which is ignorant of tensed facts can nonetheless count as omniscient. In the absence of independent grounds for accepting (O_4), such a procedure is unacceptably ad hoc. If we wish to include temporal perspectives in our definition of omniscience, then why not adopt (O_3)? On (O_3), unlike (O_4), God would know every true proposition instead of just some; this intuitively commends it as a more adequate definition of omniscience. But (O_3) would require that God know tensed propositions, thereby implying divine temporality. That, however, would present a difficulty only for the atemporalist's theology, not for the definition of "omniscience" *per se*.

[11] Edward Wierenga, *The Nature of God*, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 189.
[12] Wierenga, 198, 189.

It seems, therefore, that the specifications made in (O_3) are really superfluous, for (O_2) does not imply that *S* knows contradictories, since it does not state that *S* knows all *p* at the same time.

(ii) Second, the question arises as to whether personal indexicals are part of the propositional content of a sentence containing such terms. In other words, are there private propositions? In that case, then God is clearly not omniscient, for he cannot know such propositions as *I am Alvin Plantinga*. It might be rejoined that in knowing the proposition expressed by a sentence like

6. Jan is baking a cake,

God knows the same fact that Jan knows when she says,

7. I am baking a cake.

and that therefore the propositional content of these sentences is identical. But proponents of personally indexed propositions point out that knowledge of

8. I am lying in hospital.

is quite something else than knowledge of

9. William Craig is lying in hospital.

For if I am suffering temporary amnesia as a result of a trauma I might well know (8) to be true without knowing (9). If God is omniscient, then, he must know not only (9), but (8) as well, which is incoherent.

Such considerations, however, serve only to show that (8) and (9) express different items of knowledge; it has not been proved that the difference between knowledge of (8) in contrast to knowledge of (9) is a matter of *propositional* knowledge. According to a provocative analysis by David Lewis, there is certainly a difference between knowing (8) and knowing (9), but the difference is a matter of non-propositional knowledge.[13] Propositional knowledge like (9) is knowledge *de dicto,* but knowledge *de se* is non-propositional knowledge arising from the self-ascription of properties. If Lewis is correct, then God may be correctly characterized by (O_2) as omniscient, without thereby implying that he has all (non-propositional) knowledge. Indeed, this same solution could serve to resolve the first problem mentioned above. For while knowledge of (3) or (4) does not imply knowledge of (1) or (5) respectively, it might be contended that the difference

[13] David Lewis, "Attitudes *De Dicto* and *De Se,*" *Philosophical Review* 88, no. 4 (1979): 513–543.

between knowing (1) or (5) over merely knowing (3) or (4) is a matter of non-propositional knowledge due to self-ascription of properties.

Or, alternatively, one might adopt Jonathan Kvanvig's proposed solution that belief involves a triadic, not a dyadic, relation: in addition to the particular intentional attitude and the object of belief, there is also the way in which the propositional object is accessed.[14] One can directly and immediately grasp only propositions implying one's individual essence; all other propositions are indirectly grasped. Thus the propositions expressed by (6) and (7) are identical, but Jan grasps this proposition immediately and directly whereas anyone else, say, God, grasps it indirectly. The meanings of sentences (6) and (7) are different, as is clear from the grammatical person of the sentences, and serve as the way through which the identical proposition is differently accessed. This same analysis serves to handle tensed sentences with temporal or spatial indexicals. Propositions are tenseless and equipped with definite dates and place names, but are differently accessed by persons in different spatio-temporal locations. Hence, for example, (4) and (5) express the same proposition, but that proposition is expressed by means of sentences having different meanings, which serve as the way persons in different spatio-temporal locations grasp them.

On either analysis (O_2) remains adequate as an account of God's propositional knowledge. One very interesting consequence of both these analyses is that omniscience does not serve to exhaust God's cognitive excellence. For on both views, an omniscient being might possess all propositional knowledge and yet lack awareness of himself as himself. God's cognitive excellence surpasses even omniscience, for in addition to all propositional knowledge God also possesses appropriate non-propositional knowledge *de se*.[15]

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[14] Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *The Possibility of an All-Knowing God* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 66–71, 156–159.

[15] Linda Zagzebski has insisted that God's cognitive perfection implies his having not only appropriate knowledge *de se* but also knowledge of subjective experiences, such as how a watermelon tastes or how it feels to be a sinner or what it is like to see in color. She thinks that God has such knowledge via his "omnisubjectivity," which she characterizes as God's "direct, total, perfect empathy with all conscious beings who have ever lived or ever will live," where "perfect total empathy is a complete and accurate copy of all of a person's conscious states" (Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, "The Attribute of Omnisubjectivity (2013, 2016)" in *God, Knowledge, and the Good: Collected Papers in the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 195; cf. Linda Zagzebski, *Omnisubjectivity: A Defense of a Divine Attribute* [Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2013]). The word "direct" here is problematic. For although she affirms that omnisubjectivity is "the property of consciously grasping with perfect accuracy and completeness every conscious state of every conscious creature from that creature's first-person perspective—the perspective of *I*," she recognizes that God's empathic copy of some entity B's awareness of being B is not itself an awareness of being B. "Nobody can be aware of being B except B." So although God knows what it is like to be Donald Trump, he does not have a direct awareness of being Donald Trump. Zagzebski's view seems to imply that the world's conscious creatures function as sense organs for God, which is difficult to square with his omniscience, given the limited variety and temporal evolution of conscious creatures. If one wants to ascribe to God non-propositional knowledge of subjective experiences, it is therefore better to do so based, not on omnisubjectivity, but simply on God's ability to put himself in various mental states.

In this same vein, Charles Taliaferro charges that the typical definitions of omniscience in terms of God's propositional knowledge fail to capture the classical doctrine of omniscience, which should be understood in terms of maximal cognitive power.[16] For example, under the standard definitions of omniscience, two persons who each know the truth values of all propositions would both rank as omniscient, even if it were the case that only one of them knew such truth values immediately while the other knew them only derivatively by being informed by the first. To avoid this awkward situation, Taliaferro proposes

> O_5. *S* is omniscient $=_{def}$ It is metaphysically impossible for there to be a being with greater cognitive power than *S*, and this power is fully exercised.

Taliaferro has helpfully drawn our attention to the underappreciated connection between omnipotence and omniscience. But while I should readily agree that God's cognitive excellence is by no means exhausted by the scope and accuracy of his propositional knowledge, it does not seem to me that it is therefore necessary to revise the traditional definition of "omniscience." For "omniscience" means literally all knowledge and has no intrinsic connection with power. While an omnipotent being must plausibly be omniscient, an omniscient being need not be omnipotent, for it might lack the power to do what it knows how to do. Hence, one may define "omniscience" simply in terms of the scope and accuracy of one's propositional knowledge without prejudging the further question of one's cognitive power.

All these considerations go to show that the concept of omniscience is much more subtle than it might at first appear. I do not, however, think that these conundrums are in the end of much significance for the biblical doctrine of divine omniscience. If either Lewis or Kvanvig's proposal succeeds, then for all *p,* if *p*, the God of the Bible can be coherently said to know that *p* and not to believe that ~*p*. If propositions do include personal indexicals, however, then the biblical theist will simply say that the biblical doctrine is not that God is, in this technical sense, omniscient, and he will exempt first person propositions not referring to God from God's knowledge. Perhaps he will adopt some other term to express the biblical doctrine, like "maximally intelligent." I am going to assume that some solution such as Lewis' or Kvanvig's is tenable and that, therefore, the biblical theist should,

[16] Charles Taliaferro, "Divine Cognitive Power," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 18 (1985): 133–140. Taliaferro's treatment of divine omniscience parallels his similar treatment of divine omnipotence (Charles Taliaferro, *Consciousness and the Mind of God* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994], 278, 284), to which I allude *infra*, 419.

barring some demonstrated incoherence in the concept of omniscience, affirm divine omniscience as defined in (O_2).

6.2.2 Coherence of the Concept of Omniscience

6.2.2.1 Formal Arguments

Patrick Grim has been the most vigorous critic of the coherence of the concept of omniscience.[17] In setting the "ground rules" for his most recent objections, he explains, "I focus on the classical definition: a being is omniscient if it knows everything. More precisely, a being is omniscient if and only if it knows all truths–and, we have to add, believes no falsehoods. The beliefs of an omniscient being would correspond precisely to a set of only and all truths."[18] Immediately alarm bells should go off for the theist. For Grim's characterizations of omniscience are neither equivalent to one another nor representative of the classical definition of omniscience. His first characterization states only a sufficient condition of omniscience and makes no mention of propositional truth. His second states necessary and sufficient conditions and is framed in terms of knowing all truths, as well as believing no falsehoods. His third characterization assumes a set theoretical formulation of omniscience in terms of a set of only and all truths. Such characterizations are not part of the classic definition of omniscience, as we have seen, nor is there any reason to think that the biblical theist should be committed to any of these characterizations. Moreover, Grim presumes God to be essentially timeless and spaceless, which is also not a commitment of biblical theism, as we shall see.[19]

Grim presents four objections to the coherence of divine omniscience, the first two of which are related and so may be handled together. Grim's first objection is a version of the famous Liar Paradox which he calls "the Divine Liar." Consider

10. X does not believe that (10) is true.

Grim argues, "If (10) is true, X does not believe it, and thus X cannot be said to know all truths. If (10) is false, it is false that X does not believe it.

[17] Patrick Grim, "Some Neglected Problems of Omniscience," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20 (1983): 265–276; Patrick Grim, "There Is No Set of All Truths," *Analysis* 44, no. 4 (1984): 206–208; Patrick Grim, "Against Omniscience: The Case from Essential Indexicals," *Noûs* 19, no. 2 (1985): 151–180; Patrick Grim, "Truth, Omniscience, and the Knower," *Philosophical Studies* 54, no. 1 (1988): 9–41.
[18] Patrick Grim, "Problems with Omniscience," in *Debating Christian Theism,* ed. J. P. Moreland, Chad Meister, and Khaldoun A. Sweis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 169.
[19] See *infra*, chaps. 7, 8.

It must be true that X believes it. X therefore believes a falsehood."[20] Therefore X fails to be omniscient.

As noted, Grim's objection is a version of the Liar Paradox.[21] For consider

> 10′. (10′) is false.

If (10′) is true, then (10′) is false; and if (10′) is false, then (10′) is true. This shows that Grim's objection is not so much a problem about omniscience as a problem about truth. Hence, the problem here is of concern to any philosopher concerned with truth, not just to philosophers of religion.

Grim's second problem he styles "Omniscience and the Knower." He invites us to consider any formal system containing axioms adequate for arithmetic. For any such system we can encode formulas as numbers and use the symbol "A*" to represent a numerical encoding of any formula A. Formula B*'s being derivable from A* may be presented by I (A*, B*). Grim introduces a symbol "∇," representing the knowledge of an omniscient being. The theist clearly wants to maintain: $\nabla(A^*) \rightarrow A$ (If something is known by God, it is so) and $\nabla\ (\nabla(A^*) \rightarrow A)$ (This fact is itself known by God) and $I\ (A^*, B^*) \rightarrow [\nabla(A^*) \rightarrow \nabla(B^*)]$ (If B* is derivable from A*, then if God knows A*, God also knows B*).

But, Grim says, "no symbol can consistently mean what we have proposed ∇ to mean. . . . The addition of these simple claims to any system containing basic truths of arithmetic would give us a contradiction."[22] Once again, this is not a uniquely theological problem but is of interest to any philosopher concerned with the concept of knowledge.

Grim then considers a hierarchical solution to the problems of both the Liar and the Knower. Both paradoxes result from the use of self-referring formulas in a system. Hierarchical solutions would forbid this. Grim explains,

> The proposal. . . is that truth and related predicates form a hierarchy of different levels, each of which applies only to statements. . . on lower levels. On such an approach we can say that we know precisely what goes wrong with the divine liar and ∇: each attempts to apply a truth-related predicate beyond its hierarchically restricted reach.[23]

[20] Grim, "Problems with Omniscience," 170. I have altered the numbering of the statements.
[21] There is a vast literature on this problem (see Jeremy Wyatt and Michael P. Lynch, "From One to Many: Recent Work on Truth," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 53, no. 4 [2016]: 323–340).
[22] Grim, "Problems with Omniscience," 170.
[23] Grim, 171.

Grim does not deny that hierarchy prevents the paradoxes; but he thinks that such a solution is incompatible with the doctrine of omniscience:

> The formal charms of a hierarchical approach are many. But one thing such a route does not offer is any hope for the concept of omniscience. If truth forms a stratified hierarchy, there can be no notion that applies to truths on *all* levels. That is precisely the point of the appeal to hierarchy: were one to quantify over all levels, or to reinstate a notion of 'truth at any level,' all the machinery would be in place to create the same logical problems in the same form. If hierarchy prohibits any notion of 'truth on all levels,' however, it also prohibits any notion of omniscience; knowledge of truth 'on all levels' is precisely what the concept of omniscience would demand.[24]

It seems, however, that Grim's argument against hierarchical omniscience is a *non-sequitur*. What hierarchical solutions prohibit is a sort of cumulative truth, truth on all levels taken together. One cannot collect together truths from different levels. But the defender of omniscience who adopts hierarchy does no such thing. While we cannot quantify over all truths collectively, we can nonetheless quantify over levels and say that for any level, God knows all the truths at that level. The whole point of the hierarchy is to make truth relative to a level.

So a hierarchical theorist like Robert Koons holds that one of the attractions of the hierarchical solution to the Liar Paradox is that it provides "a simple and direct solution to corresponding problems involving knowledge, including omniscience. On my fully worked out view, there is a hierarchy of knowledge-predicates that matches the truth-predicates. So, God knows (at an appropriate level) each truth (at whatever level)."[25]

Grim's third objection is an eponymous argument he calls "the Cantorian argument" after the founder of infinite set theory Georg Cantor:

> The beliefs of an omniscient being. . . would correspond precisely to a set of all and only true propositions. Because there can be no set of all and only true propositions, there cannot be what an omniscient being would have to know, and thus there can be no omniscient being.[26]

This objection shows only that omniscience should not be defined in set theoretical terms. Typically, omniscience is defined in terms of universal

[24] Grim, 171.
[25] Robert Koons, personal correspondence, September 19, 2016; see further Robert Koons, *Paradoxes of Belief and Strategic Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), appendix C.
[26] Grim, "Problems with Omniscience," 171.

quantification: for example, for every proposition *p*, if *p*, God knows that *p*. Neither the theist nor anyone else should think that there is a set of all truths, anymore than a set of all sets.

Grim acknowledges that Plantinga and others have denied that omniscience should be defined in terms of a set of all truths.[27] But he claims that his Cantorian argument goes through without the assumption of a set (or even a class) of all truths. He writes,

> Consider. . . any 'many' truths you like–the truths that any particular being knows, for example. Consider also truths about one or more of those truths. Using the notions outlined above, phrased entirely in the plural, it is possible to show that the first truths can be mapped *into* but not *onto* the second truths. There are too many of the latter. No matter how many truths are at issue therefore, they cannot be *all* the truths.[28]

From such expressions as "any 'many' truths" and "*all* the truths," it is evident that Grim is still thinking about collecting all the truths together into a collection, which cannot be done. Note his summary statement: "One way of phrasing the result is this: Within any logic we have, there can be no totality of truths. Within any logic we have, there can therefore be no omniscience."[29] Grim later admits, "If truth and related predicates form a structured hierarchy, the Cantorian argument will lose traction much as did the knower and the divine liar."[30] But omniscience does not require that there be a totality of truths. God can still believe every truth at any level without there being a body of all truths which he knows.[31] In what follows whenever I speak colloquially of God's knowing all truths, such expressions should be understood as rough for God's knowing every truth at any level.

The final objection raised by Grim is the so-called "Problem of the Essential Indexical." Grim claims that the propositional content of sentences involving personal, temporal, and spatial indexical words like "I," "now," and "here," cannot be grasped from a neutral, non-perspectival standpoint. "There are things that I know–what I know when I know I am

[27] See the enlightening exchange between Alvin Plantinga and Patrick Grim, "Truth, Omniscience, and Cantorian Arguments: An Exchange," *Philosophical Studies* 71, no. 3 (1993): 267–306.
[28] Grim, "Problems with Omniscience," 173.
[29] Grim, 178.
[30] Grim, 178.
[31] Grim also considers whether there might be some new, yet to be discovered logic in which there will be a place for a totality of truths. Interestingly, some of these alternatives to classical logic are solutions defended in current discussions about truth (see again Wyatt and Lynch, "Recent Work on Truth"). But since the theist is not committed to there being a totality of truths, we pass over this section in benign neglect.

making a mess, for example–that no other being can know. . . . There can therefore be no omniscient being."[32]

We shall have much more to say about God's knowledge of propositions expressed by sentences containing temporal and spatial indexical terms in our treatment of divine eternity and omnipresence.[33] Grim just assumes divine timelessness and spacelessness without justification. Grim argues that personal indexical knowledge is different knowledge than the knowledge one has from a neutral, non-perspectival position. The point may be granted; but Grim has not shown that the difference is a matter of knowing different propositions, which is what is relevant to divine omniscience on traditional accounts. For now, we may note that Grim's argument commits him to the existence of purely private propositions, which very few philosophers would want to admit. So far forth, then, Grim has not shown that the traditional concept of omniscience is logically incoherent.

6.2.2.2 Practical Arguments

Brian Leftow entertains the idea of revising the definition of "omniscience" in such a way that omniscience is consistent with ignorance of some truths.[34] He is particularly exercised by the challenge to divine timelessness posed by God's knowledge of tensed truths. He argues, in effect, that there are many sorts of truths which God cannot know, so there is no harm in admitting one more class of truths (namely, tensed truths) of which God is ignorant.

We shall take up the question of God's knowledge of tensed truths in the sequel,[35] but for now we may ask, does Leftow succeed in showing that there are truths which God cannot know? I think not. His examples of things God cannot know include how it feels to be oneself a failure or a sinner. But Leftow has confused non-propositional with propositional knowledge. *Knowing how* does not take *truths* as its object. God can know such truths as *Being a sinner feels lousy, Being a sinner feels depressing, Sinners feel guilty and hopeless,* and so on. These are the facts about how it feels to be oneself a sinner, and God knows these truths. When we talk about omniscience, we are speaking of knowledge in the sense of *knowing that,* where "knowing that" is followed by some propositional truth. God's not knowing how it feels to be himself a sinner is not an example of a truth he fails to know and

[32] Grim, "Problems with Omniscience," 176.
[33] See *infra*, 340–350, 414–415.
[34] Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 321–323.
[35] See *infra*, 220–226.

so does not constitute a restriction on his omniscience. Leftow furnishes no example of any truth which might be conjoined with "knows that" such that we cannot say, "God knows that ____," where the blank is filled by the truth in question. Therefore, he has not adequately motivated our denying that knowledge of tensed truths properly belongs to omniscience.

It seems to me, therefore, that no adequate grounds have been given for thinking that the concept of omniscience is incoherent. The traditional definition of omniscience framed in term of God's propositional knowledge seems coherent, and we have no grounds which do not involve special pleading for revising the usual definition.

6.2.3 Omniscience sans Propositions

Throughout this discussion, we have assumed that omniscience ought to be defined in terms of knowledge of propositions. But some thinkers have rejected an analysis of God's omniscience in terms of his belief in or knowledge of propositions. For example, William Alston argues that since God grasps any concrete whole in its fullness and has no need to extend his knowledge, inferentially or otherwise, by isolating separate propositions, there is no point in carving up God's intuition of reality into separate propositions.[36] As finite knowers we have to represent God's knowledge as knowledge of this or that particular fact, but in itself it is an undivided intuition. Alston emphasizes that such a view does not depend on any Thomistic doctrine of divine simplicity. If Alston's view is correct, then, he thinks, it is misleading to define God's omniscience in terms of propositional knowledge, since his knowledge has no such structure. And even if God's knowledge is propositional, continues Alston, it does not follow that God has beliefs. Alston champions an intuitive conception of knowledge, according to which knowledge of a fact is simply immediate awareness of that fact. Even God's being aware of *x* as *P* does not imply his belief that *x* is *P,* where that claim commits us to saying that God possesses a belief that is capable of being false; for God is infallible. Immediate awareness of facts is the highest form of knowledge and cannot therefore be denied to God.

Alston's denial that God has beliefs seems to require his model of God's intuitive, non-propositional knowledge, for once we grant propositional structure to God's knowledge, it seems clear that God infallibly believes each one of them – I see no reason to think that "belief" entails fallibility, as Alston seems to think. Nor does it seem to me that any advantage is to be obtained in the debate over theological fatalism by denying that God has beliefs, as Alston alleges. For even if there are no past facts consisting of God's beliefs,

[36] William Alston, "Does God Have Beliefs?," *Religious Studies* 22 (1986): 287–306.

still there is the past fact of his intuitive awareness at t_1 of events that will happen at t_2, and the future contingent propositions of which he is aware or which we use to represent his undivided intuition are still antecedently true or false, so that the argument for fatalism may proceed as before.

In any case, the denial that God has beliefs is ontologically significant only if Alston is speaking in a metaphysically heavyweight sense, such that the affirmation that God has beliefs is ontologically committing, according to Quine's criterion, to actual objects called beliefs. Many philosophers would, I suspect, be reluctant to say that even if God believes that *p*, beliefs are things that exist in a heavyweight sense. If we are speaking in a lightweight sense, it is unobjectionable to affirm that God has beliefs.

If an intuitive, non-propositional model of God's knowledge proves to be coherent,[37] then the theist might be inclined to adopt such a model. I do not, however, think that such a move would force us to jettison our traditional definition of omniscience in terms of propositional knowledge;[38] we need only add the proviso that such a definition expresses the human point of view: as finite knowers we grasp God's knowledge in propositional terms. By means of such a definition, we adequately capture the extent and infallibility of God's *de re* knowledge, though not its mode, since we represent his undivided intuition in a fragmented way. For convenience's sake, I shall continue to speak anthropocentrically of God's knowledge as propositional.

Now unless future contingent propositions or, alternatively, tenseless propositions about future contingents fail for some reason to be true, then an omniscient God must know all such true propositions. Here the God of the philosophers coincides with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for in this case, at least, philosophical and biblical theology are in one accord that if such propositions are true, then God knows contingent events which are future with respect to the present time.

6.3 Divine Foreknowledge of Future Contingents

Undoubtedly the most controversial aspect of the doctrine of divine omniscience, both historically and on the contemporary scene, concerns God's knowledge of future contingents, in particular of free human decisions. A surprising number of contemporary Christian philosophers and theologians have denied the traditional doctrine that God possesses such knowledge. Since God lacks both hypothetical knowledge of how things would go if he were to act in certain ways as well as foreknowledge of how things will in fact go, God can neither predict nor

[37] See Kvanvig, *All-Knowing God*, 38–46.
[38] *Pace* Arbour, "Perfect Knowledge," 117.

plan the course of future events. As a result, God is ignorant of virtually all of humanity's future, since even a single free choice might turn the course of history in a different direction than its present course. Subsequent events would, as time goes on, diverge increasingly from history's present trajectory. At best God can be said to make intelligent guesses about what will happen in the near future and then react to events as they happen. He is therefore said to be a "risk-taking" God. According to some revisionist construals of divine omniscience, God is sometimes wrong in his expectations of the future and therefore makes mistakes, which he later regrets.

6.3.1 Philosophical Grounds for Affirming Divine Foreknowledge

Having considered biblical grounds for affirming God's knowledge of future contingents, we now want to ask what philosophical reasons there might be for thinking that God knows the future. Here an obvious argument from perfect being theology presents itself. For ignorance is an imperfection; all things being equal, it is greater to be knowledgeable than ignorant. Therefore a maximally great being, a perfect being, must be omniscient. In particular, if there are truths about future contingents, God, as an omniscient being, must know these truths. Since there are such truths about the future, that is to say, since propositions about future contingents are either true or false, and they are not all false, God must therefore know all truths about the future.

We can formulate this reasoning as follows:

11. God is a perfect being.
12. Any being which is perfect is omniscient.
13. An omniscient being knows all truths.
14. There are truths about future contingents.

From these four premises we can infer:

15. Therefore, God is omniscient. (from 1, 2)
16. Therefore, God knows all truths. (from 3, 5)
17. Therefore, God knows the truths about future contingents. (from 4, 6)

Premises (11) and (12) seem to be incontestable. By definition God is a being who is worthy of worship, and no imperfect being could merit such unqualified adoration. Moreover, as a perfection, omniscience would seem to be among the attributes of any perfect being. The first two steps of the argument are therefore uncontroversial.

So the revisionist theologian, if he is to resist the force of this reasoning, will have to attack either (13) or (14). These two premises lie at the very heart of the contemporary debate.

Now (13), *modulo* hierarchical concerns, seems to be true by definition: to be omniscient just means to know only and all truths. Those who want to deny (13) are therefore forced to come up with a new definition of omniscience which does not involve knowledge of every truth. Recall the traditional definition of omniscience:

> O_2. *S* is omniscient $=_{def}$ For all *p*, if *p*, *S* knows that *p* and does not believe that ~*p*.

(O_2) entails that if there are future-tense truths, then an omniscient being knows them.

Opponents of divine foreknowledge have suggested revisionary definitions of divine omniscience so that they can affirm that God is omniscient, even though he lacks knowledge of future contingents.[39] William Hasker's revisionist definition is typical:

> O_6. God is omniscient $=_{def.}$ God knows all propositions which are such that God's knowing them is logically possible.

Revisionists then go on to claim that it is logically impossible to know propositions about future contingents, and therefore God may count as omniscient despite his ignorance of an infinite number of true future-tense propositions.

As it stands, however, (O_6) is drastically flawed. For it does not exclude that God believes false propositions as well as true ones. Worse, (O_6) actually requires God to know false propositions, which is incoherent as well as theologically unacceptable. For (O_6) requires that if it is logically possible for God to know some proposition *p*, then God knows *p*. But if *p* is a contingently false proposition, say, *There are six planets in the solar system,* then there are possible worlds in which *p* is true and so known by God. Therefore, since it is logically possible for God to know *p*, he must according to (O_6) actually know *p*, which is absurd.

[39] For the following definition see William Hasker, "A Philosophical Perspective," in Clark Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 136.

Perhaps what the revisionist really wants to say is something like

> O_7. God is omniscient $=_{def.}$ God knows only and all true propositions which are such that it is logically possible for God to know them.

Unlike (O_6), (O_7) limits God's knowledge to a certain subclass of all true propositions, namely, those which it is logically possible for God to know.

The fundamental problem with all such revisionary definitions of omniscience as (O_7) is that any adequate definition of a concept must accord with our intuitive understanding of the concept. We are not at liberty to "cook" the definition in some desired way without thereby making the definition unacceptably contrived. (O_7) is guilty of being "cooked" in this way. For, intuitively, omniscience involves knowing every truth, yet according to (O_7) God could conceivably be ignorant of infinite realms of truths and yet still count as "omniscient." The only reason why someone would prefer (O_7) to (O_2) is due to an ulterior motivation to salvage the attribute of omniscience for a cognitively limited deity rather than to deny outright that God is omniscient. (O_7) is therefore unacceptably contrived.

Second, the superiority of (O_7) over (O_2) depends on there being an intrinsic difference between a truth and a truth which it is logically possible to know. If there is no difference, then (O_7) collapses back to (O_2), and the revisionist has gained nothing. But it is far from evident that there is any intrinsic difference. For what is a sufficient condition for a proposition to be logically knowable? So far as I can see, the only condition is that the proposition be true. What more is needed? If the revisionist thinks that something more is needed, then we may ask him for an example of a proposition that could be true but logically impossible to know. A proposition like *Nothing exists* or *All persons have ceased to exist* comes to mind. If these were true, they could not possibly be known to be true. But on traditional theism these propositions are necessarily false, since God is a personal being whose non-existence is impossible. Unless the revisionist can give us some reason to think that a proposition can be true and yet unknowable, we have no reason to adopt (O_7). It seems that the only intrinsic property which a proposition must possess in order to be logically knowable is truth.

The revisionist will no doubt claim at this point that propositions about future contingents are logically impossible for God to know. For if he knows them, then they are necessarily true, not contingently true. This is an assertion of theological fatalism, the doctrine that if God knows some future-tense proposition *p*, then *p* is necessarily true. We shall examine the fatalist's argument below; but here we may note that even if we concede that his argument is sound, it still does not follow that future contingent

propositions are logically impossible for God to know. The revisionist claims that for any future-tense proposition *p* it is impossible that God know *p* and *p* be contingently true. Therefore, he reasons, if *p* is contingently true, it is not possible that God knows *p*. Thus, by his revised definition of omniscience, God is exempted from having to know *p*.

But such reasoning is logically fallacious. The two premises

18. Not-possibly (God knows *p*, and *p* is contingently true).

and

19. *p* is contingently true.

do not logically entail that

20. Not-possibly (God knows *p*).

Rather what follows logically from (18) and (19) is merely

20′. Not (God knows *p*).

In other words, what follows from (18) and (19) is merely that God does not know *p*, not that it is impossible that God knows *p*.

Thus, even granted the fatalist's premise (18) that it is impossible that God know *p* and *p* be contingently true, it does not follow from the contingency of *p* that *p* is such that it is logically impossible for God to know *p*. Therefore, even on the defective definition (O_7) proposed by the revisionist, the revisionist's God turns out not to be omniscient, since *p* is a true proposition which, so far as we can see, is logically possible for God to know, and yet God does not know *p*. Thus, on the proffered redefinition of "omniscience" the revisionist must deny divine omniscience and therefore reject God's perfection – a very serious theological consequence, indeed.[40]

So revisionist theologians unwilling to abandon God's perfection have in the end no choice but to deny

14. There are truths about future contingents.

[40] If all this were not enough, the revisionist's position is ultimately logically incoherent. For he agrees that it is logically possible to know any true, present-tense proposition. But if future-tense propositions are true or false, then there are present-tense propositions like "The future-tense proposition *p* is presently true" which must be known to God. It cannot reasonably be denied that God must know such present-tense propositions. Hence, the detractor of divine foreknowledge cannot coherently affirm that there are true future-tense propositions and yet deny that God knows such propositions–he must deny the truth of future-tense propositions. That is to say, he must deny premise (14) of our argument.

That is to say, they must deny that any future-tense, contingent statements about events in all but the immediate future have the truth value *true*.[41]

How can this be done? Revisionist theologians might try to deny the truth of future contingent statements by contending that the Principle of Bivalence that for any proposition *p*, *p* has one of two truth values, *true* or *false*, fails for future contingent propositions. Such propositions are either truth valueless or have some third truth value like *indeterminate*.

Such a view, however, is difficult plausibly to maintain.

First, there is no good reason to think that the Principle of Bivalence fails for future contingent propositions. Why should we accept the view that future-tense propositions about free acts, propositions expressed by statements that we use all the time in ordinary conversation and, moreover, that are found in Scripture, are in fact neither true nor false? What argument is there that the Principle of Bivalence fails for such propositions?

About the only answer of any substance that is ever given to this question goes something like this: Future events, unlike present events, do not exist. Now, a proposition is true if and only if it corresponds to what exists, and false if and only if it does not correspond to what exists. Since the future does not exist, there is nothing for future-tense propositions to correspond to or to fail to correspond to. Hence, future-tense propositions cannot be true or false.

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[41] Note that the truth of future contingent propositions is a sufficient but not a necessary condition for (14). For (14) does not specify that the truths must be tensed. This is important because some philosophers have sought to elude fatalism by maintaining that the propositions expressed by tensed statements are timelessly true or false and therefore are not true literally in advance of the events they predict. This view requires that all tensed statements be put into tenseless versions by specifying the date and eliminating any indexicals. In a similar way, certain theologians have held that God is timeless and has timeless knowledge of all events, whether these events are to us past, present, or future. Therefore, he does not literally foreknow anything, and so nothing can be fated by his knowledge.

The view that all tensed sentences can be translated into tenseless statements without loss of meaning has, however, come under broad attack. But that point aside, it is not clear that tenseless statements or propositions are in fact timelessly true. Most of the advocates of tenseless statements take them to be true at all times rather than timelessly true. If tenseless statements are true at all times rather than timelessly true, they are true in advance of the events they report, so that the truth of future contingent propositions is not avoided. Now a few philosophers might insist that tenseless statements are indeed timelessly true. But even the timeless truth about events future to us is sufficient for the truth of (14).

As for fatalism, even if truth itself is timeless, still one may truly assert in advance of some event that that event occurs at its future time. For example, it may be truly asserted in 1985 that "George Bush *wins* the 1992 U.S. presidential election," even if this statement is itself timelessly true. In the same way, even if God is timeless, the statement "God *knows* timelessly that some event occurs in my future" would still be true in advance of the event. If one insists that this statement is also timelessly true, still it may be truly asserted in advance that "God *knows* timelessly that this event occurs in my future," which is once more all the fatalist needs. Thus, even holding that truth and God are timeless will not suffice to enable us to elude fatalism.

Such an argument presupposes a tensed, as opposed to a tenseless, theory of time according to which the past, present, and future are not equally real. Since, as we shall see, a tensed theory seems the more plausible view,[42] let us assume that some such theory is correct. If we take tense to belong to the propositional content expressed by tensed statements, the issue is whether, given a tensed theory of time, a view of truth as correspondence requires us to deny that future-tense propositions are either true or false. Those who think so seem to misunderstand the concept of truth as correspondence. A view of truth as correspondence holds merely that a proposition is true if and only if what it states to be the case really is the case. For example, the proposition *It is snowing* is true if and only if it is snowing. Although this might seem too obvious to be worth stating, it is sometimes misunderstood. Truth as correspondence does *not* imply that the things or events which a true proposition is about must exist. Indeed, it is at most only in the case of true present-tense propositions that the things or events referred to must exist.[43] For a past-tense proposition to be true it is not required that what it describes exist, but only that it *have* existed. For a future-tense proposition to be true it is not required that what it describes exist, but that it *will* exist. In order for a future-tense proposition to be true, all that is required is that when the moment in question arrives, the present-tense version of the proposition will be true. The idea that the concept of truth as correspondence requires that the things or events described by the proposition must exist at the time the proposition is true is a complete misunderstanding.

To say that a future-tense proposition is now true is not, of course, to say that we may now know whether it is true or to say that things are now so determined that it is true. It is only to say that when the time arrives, things will turn out as the proposition predicts. A future-tense proposition is true if matters turn out as the proposition predicts, and false if matters fail to turn out as the proposition predicts–that is all that the notion of truth as correspondence requires. Hence, there is no good reason to deny that future-tense propositions are either true or false.

Second, there are several good reasons to maintain that the Principle of Bivalence holds for future contingent propositions.

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[42] See *infra*, 352–353.

[43] Even in the case of true present tense propositions, we have seen in our discussion of divine aseity that the things or events we refer to by means of singular terms may not exist. See further this *Systematic Philosophical Theology,* vol. I, *Prolegomena*, 61–62.

(i) *The same facts that guarantee the truth or falsity of present- and past-tense propositions also guarantee the truth or falsity of future-tense propositions.* Nicholas Rescher explains,

> Difficulties about divine foreknowledge quite apart, it is difficult to justify granting to
>
> 1. "It will rain tomorrow" (asserted on April 12)
>
> a truth status different from that of
>
> 2. "It did rain yesterday" (asserted on April 14)
>
> because both make (from temporally distinct perspectives) *precisely the same claim about the facts,* viz., rain on April 13.[44]

If *It is raining today* is now true, how could *It will rain tomorrow* not have been true yesterday? Recall that to say that a future-tense proposition is now true is only to say that when the relevant time arrives, things will turn out as the proposition predicts. The same facts guarantee that a future-tense proposition asserted earlier, a present-tense proposition asserted simultaneously, and a past-tense proposition asserted later are all true.

(ii) *If future-tense propositions are not true, then neither are past-tense propositions.* If future-tense propositions cannot be true because the realities they describe do not yet exist, then by the same token many past-tense propositions cannot be true because the realities they describe no longer exist. But to maintain that past-tense propositions cannot be true would be evidently false. Since the two cases are parallel, one must either deny the truth or falsity of both past- and future-tense propositions or affirm the truth or falsity of both.

(iii) *Tenseless propositions are always true or false.* It is possible to eliminate the tense of the verb in a statement expressing a proposition by specifying the time at which the proposition is supposed to be true. For example, the statement "The Allies invaded Normandy" can be made tenseless by specifying the time: "On June 6, 1944, the Allies *invade* Normandy," the italics indicating that the verb "invade" is tenseless. If the tensed version is true, then so is the tenseless version. Thus, correlated with any true past- or present-tense statement is a true tenseless version of that statement. Furthermore, a proposition expressed by a tenseless statement, if it is true at all, is *always* true. This is precisely because the proposition is tenseless. If *On June 6, 1944, the Allies invade Normandy* is *ever* true, then it is *always* true. Therefore, this proposition is true prior to June 6,

[44] Nicholas Rescher, *Many-Valued Logic* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), 2–3.

> 1944. But in that case, it is true prior to June 6, 1944 that the Allies on that date will invade Normandy, which is the same as saying that the future-tense version of the tenseless statement is true. Moreover, since God is omniscient, he must always know the truth of the tenseless proposition, a fact which entails that he foreknows the future.

Third, the denial of the Principle of Bivalence with respect to future contingent propositions has absurd consequences. For example, if future contingent propositions are neither true nor false, the assertion made in 2002 "George W. Bush either will or will not win the U.S. presidential election in 2004" would not be true. For this statement is a truth-functional disjunction of two simple future-tense statements: "George W. Bush will win the U.S. presidential election in 2004" and "George W. Bush will not win the U.S. presidential election in 2004." If neither of these individual statements is true or false, the disjunction of them is also neither true nor false. But how can this be? From the standpoint of 2002, either Bush will win or he will not–there is no other alternative! But the view that future contingent propositions are neither true nor false would require us to say that this disjunctive statement is neither true nor false, which seems absurd.

Worse still, if future contingent propositions are neither true nor false, it would be impossible for us to say truly that a statement made in 2002 like "Bush will both win and not win the presidential election in 2004" is false. For this statement is a truth-functional conjunction of two simple future-tense statements, neither of which is supposed to be true or false. Therefore, the conjunctive statement cannot be true or false either. But surely this statement is false, for it is a self-contradiction: Bush cannot both win and not win the election.

We must conclude that with no good reason in favor of it, persuasive reasons against it, and absurd consequences following from it, the view that the Principle of Bivalence fails for future contingent propositions is untenable.

The Oxford tense logician Arthur N. Prior proposed a different way of denying the truth of future contingent propositions: he held that all future contingent statements are false.[45] Now at face value this suggestion seems very queer. For if it is false to assert in 2000 that "Bush will win the 2004 presidential election," then surely it is true to assert then that "Bush will not win the 2004 presidential election." For to say that a statement is false is equivalent to saying that the negation of that statement is true. Hence,

[45] Arthur N. Prior, "The Formalities of Omniscience," in *Papers on Time and Tense* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 38–40; see also Arthur N. Prior, "Identifiable Individuals," in Prior, *Time and Tense*, 66–77.

if it is false that Bush will win, it is true that he will not win. But Prior's proposal requires us to say that both of these statements are false.

Prior tries to get around the problem by reinterpreting what the negation of a future-tense statement is. He rejects, for example, the form:

Affirmation: Bush will win the election.
Negation: Bush will not win the election.

in favor of

Affirmation: Bush will win the election.
Negation: It is not the case that Bush will win the election.

That is to say, when we form the negation of a future-tense statement, we should do so by prefacing the affirmation with "it is not the case that. . . ." In this way, the negation of a future-tense statement is always true, since all future-tense statements are false. If the future-tense statement is itself negative, for example, "Bush will not win the election," the negation is still true, namely, "It is not the case that Bush will not win the election." Hence, it is not the case that Bush will win, and it is not the case that he will not win. Neither of these is the case in 2002 because there is a "gap in the facts," for in 2002 the election has not yet occurred.

Now Prior was a great logician, but it seems clear that he made a mistake in his reinterpretation of what the negation of a future-tense statement is. The use of expressions like "it is the case," "it was the case," and "it will be the case," is a device used to eliminate the tense of the verb in a sentence. For example, we can render "Reagan won the 1980 election" as "It was the case that Reagan wins the 1980 election." The tense of the verb is transferred to the clause "it was the case." With regard to our previous example, the affirmation and negation should then be:

Affirmation: It will be the case that Bush wins the election.
Negation: It will not be the case that Bush wins the election.

Here there is no gap in the facts, for the statements assert merely that at some future time Bush's election or loss will be the case.

Prior would say that the negation is still in an incorrect form. Rather it should be:

Affirmation: It will be the case that Bush wins the election.
Negation: It is not the case that it will be the case that Bush wins the election.

But does such a reinterpretation make any difference at all? To say that it is not the case that Bush's election will be the case seems to be the same as saying that Bush's election will not be the case. Regardless, what reason is there for preferring Prior's reinterpretation, with all its ambiguity, to the normal understanding of negation?

Prior's answer is that at least statements about individuals who do not yet exist cannot be true, because nobody exists for the statements to be about. Insofar as the statement "William Willis will be president in 3000" does not refer to someone who exists, it cannot be true. There is no such person as William Willis. Therefore, no statement about him can be true.

We can respond to Prior in either of two ways: (1) Before creating the world, God knew all the logically possible worlds he could create, populated by all the logically possible individuals he could create.[46] William Willis is a member of some of those possible worlds, and in some of them he is President in 3000. Since God knows which world he has created, he knows whether or not the actual world is a world in which Willis will be president. Hence, individuals who do not yet exist can be identified on the basis of God's knowing all logically possible worlds, all logically possible individuals, and the world and individuals he has chosen to actually create.

(2) We can, like Prior himself, conceive of the present as branching off into various directions, each representing a different possible future course of events. By providing complete and accurate descriptions in terms of genealogy, place, time, and so forth, we can pick out possible individuals on particular branches. Of course, we do not know which branch represents the actual future, but that does not stop us from referring to nonexistent individuals and making statements about them. Hence, a statement about William Willis, if we make clear whose descendant he is supposed to be, can be true and will be true if the branch we have in mind should turn out to be the actual future.

A further shortcoming of Prior's view is that even if it were acceptable, it would still fail to avert the truth of future contingent propositions and so to escape the fatalism feared by revisionists. For as individuals come to be born and exist, future-tense statements about them would become true or false. Hence his view would lead to a sort of "creeping fatalism," as individuals come to exist and statements about them become true.

Finally, Prior's view leads to an absurd consequence. For in his view, if someone says in 1990, "Bush will win the presidential election in 1992," and in 1992 Bush does win, we still have to say that his future-tense statement was false. But this seems absurd, for what else does it mean for a

[46] Obviously this could be stated more technically in terms of individual essences and instantiations thereof.

future-tense statement to be true than for things to turn out as the statement says they will? Prior himself confesses that his view has this "perverse" consequence and sees no way to avoid it.

With no reason to commend it, an absurd consequence following from it, and creeping fatalism implied by it, Prior's view does not provide a plausible answer to fatalism.

Premise (14) thus cannot be plausibly denied. It follows that the revisionist view that God does not possess knowledge of future contingents is untenable. As an omniscient being, God must know all true propositions, including future contingent propositions. He therefore knows future contingents.

6.3.2 Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom

Detractors of the biblical doctrine of divine foreknowledge usually raise two objections to that doctrine: (1) Divine foreknowledge is incompatible with future contingents, and (2) There is no basis on which God can know future contingents. Let us explore each of these issues in turn.

6.3.2.1 Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents

The first issue raises the question of theological fatalism, the claim that divine foreknowledge of the future implies that everything that happens happens necessarily. Ancient Greek thought was infected with fatalism, and the Church Fathers felt obliged stoutly to resist it. Greek fatalism was purely logical: if it is true that some event will happen, then it will necessarily happen. For the Church Fathers fatalism took on a theological coloring: if God foreknows that some event will happen, then it will necessarily happen. Almost every major Christian philosophical theologian after Origen had something to say about this question, the vast majority defending the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom, but some like Martin Luther and Jonathan Edwards, who denied libertarian freedom, endorsing theological fatalism.

Aristotle had sought to avoid fatalism by denying the validity of the Principle of Bivalence for future contingent propositions; that is to say, he held that propositions about future contingents are neither true nor false.[47] Such a position would be compatible with divine omniscience, since no

[47] See Aristotle, *On Interpretation* 9. For detailed discussion see William Lane Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez,* Studies in Intellectual History 7 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), chap. 1.

truths remain unknown by God; but such a solution was not open to the Church Fathers in light of the biblical doctrine that God has foreknowledge (*prognōsis*) and the many biblical examples of detailed prophecies of future contingent events. Some contemporary philosophers, notably the Polish logician Jan Łukasiewicz, have followed Aristotle's lead,[48] but few have found this course attractive in view of the logical dislocations and implausibilities attending this position.[49]

6.3.2.1.1 The Argument for Theological Fatalism

What is the argument that is taken to justify theological fatalism? The most elementary form of the fatalistic argument runs as follows:

21. Necessarily (If God knows *p,* then *p*).

22. God knows *p*.

Therefore,

23. Necessarily (*p*).

Since *p* is necessarily true, it does not describe a contingent event. In virtue of God's foreknowledge everything is fated to occur.

The problem with the elementary argument is that it is logically fallacious. What is validly implied by (21) and (22) is not (23) but

23′. *p*.

It is correct that in a valid, deductive argument the conclusion follows ecessarily from the premises. That is to say, it is impossible for the premises to be true and the conclusion to be false. But the conclusion itself need not be necessary. The fatalist illicitly transfers the necessity of the *inference* to the conclusion *itself*. Medieval theologians understood that the elementary argument for theological fatalism thus confuses *necessitas consequentiae* (necessity of the consequence or inference) with *necessitas consequentis* (necessity of the consequent or conclusion). What necessarily follows from (21) and (22) is just the contingent proposition (23′). But the fatalist

[48] Jan Łukasiewicz, "Philosophical Remarks on Many-Valued Systems of Propositional Logic," in *Polish Logic 1920–1939*, ed. Storrs McCall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 40–65.

[49] For discussion, see William Lane Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom: The Coherence of Theism I: Omniscience*, Studies in Intellectual History 19 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), chap. 4.

confusedly thinks that the conclusion is itself necessarily true and so winds up with (23). In so doing, he simply commits a common logical fallacy.[50]

Contemporary theological fatalists recognize the fallaciousness of the above form of the argument and therefore try to remedy the defect by making premise (2) also necessarily true:

21. Necessarily (If God knows *p,* then *p*).

22′. Necessarily (God knows *p*).

Therefore,

23. Necessarily (*p*).

So formulated, the argument is logically valid, and the question becomes the truth of the premises.

Consider, by way of example, the arguments of two of the most influential contemporary proponents of the case for theological fatalism. A. N. Prior fears that the assumption "If God has always known that it would be that *p,* then *p*" has fatalistic implications. For the antecedent is necessarily true because it is past and *quod fuit, non potest non fuisse* (what has been cannot now not have been). He explains, "For what is the case already has by that very fact passed out of the realm of alternative possibilities into the realm of what cannot be altered. Once it is, that which is is-necessarily, and once it is-not, that which is-not necessarily-is-not, i.e. when it passes from the future into the present and so into the past, a thing's chance of being otherwise has disappeared."[51] Since the antecedent is in this sense necessary, the consequent is also necessary. Prior notes that the charge that this argument confuses *necessitas consequentiae*

[50] Undoubtedly a major source of the fatalist's confusion is his conflating *certainty* with *necessity*. One frequently finds in the writings of contemporary theological fatalists statements which slide from affirming that something is *certainly* true to affirming that it is *necessarily* true. This is a mistake. Certainty is a property of persons and has nothing to do with truth, as is evident from the fact that we can be absolutely certain about something and yet turn out to be wrong. By contrast, necessity is a property of propositions, indicating that a proposition cannot possibly have a different truth value. We can be wholly uncertain about propositions which are, unbeknownst to us, necessarily true (imagine some complex mathematical equation or theorem). Thus, when we say that some proposition is "certainly true," this is but a manner of speaking indicating that we are certain that the proposition is true. People are certain; propositions are necessary.

By confusing certainty and necessity, the fatalist makes his logically fallacious argument deceptively appealing. For it is correct that from premises (21) and (22) we can be absolutely certain that the events described by *p* will happen. But it is muddle-headed to think that because they will certainly happen they will necessarily happen. We can be certain, given God's foreknowledge, that the events foreknown will not fail to happen, even though it is entirely possible that they fail to happen. They could fail to occur, but God knows that they will not. Therefore, we can be sure that they will happen—and happen contingently.

[51] A. N. Prior, *Formal Logic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 241.

with *neccessitas consequentis* is groundless, since the proponents of this fatalistic argument "have in fact been perfectly aware of the distinction; what they are exploiting is a certain logical relation that does exist between the two sorts of necessity . . . , namely that where *not only the implication as a whole, but also the implying proposition, is necessarily true*, there the necessarily implied proposition is necessarily true also."[52] The necessity attaching to the consequent is a sort of temporal inevitability or unpreventability.

Prior formulates a complicated argument for a purely logical fatalism based on the temporal necessity of the past truth of future-tense statements, leading to the conclusion that if it will be the case that *p*, then necessarily it will be the case that *p*.[53] Prior then considers the Thomist and Ockhamist solutions to theological fatalism. Aquinas maintained that because God is timeless, *est scitum a Deo* means that if God knows a thing, it *is*, rather than it *will be*. But Prior, who subscribes to a tensed view of time, cannot see how the pastness, presentness, or futurity of an event can be relative to the persons knowing it.[54] The future has an openness to alternatives which the past lacks, and this openness cannot be observer relative–either it exists or it does not. Moreover, since what was future is now and will be past, Prior cannot understand what is meant by saying future contingent events are neither future nor contingent as God sees them. Indeed, how could God see an event as present and thus beyond alteration until it is? For these reasons, Prior cannot adopt a Thomist solution.

But neither does he find the Ockhamist solution compelling.[55] According to this view, not all past-tense propositions are temporally necessary, but only those not equivalent to future-tense propositions. Over these latter we do have the power to determine their truth-value. For example, by deciding whether or not to smoke tomorrow, I decide whether to make it to have been true yesterday that I would smoke two days later. The Ockhamist agrees that if I am now smoking, it now-unpreventably was the case this time yesterday that I would be smoking a day later. But he would deny that if I am now smoking, it was the case this time yesterday that I then-unpreventably would be smoking a day later. Prior acknowledges that for the Ockhamist, it is contingently true or false at some point in the past

[52] Arthur N. Prior, "Time and Determinism," in *Past, Present, and Future* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 115–116.
[53] Prior, "Formalities of Omniscience," 41.
[54] Prior, 43.
[55] Prior, 34–36; cf. Prior, "Time and Determinism," 121–127.

whether it was the case that a future contingent event will occur, and this makes Prior uneasy:

> I think I can attach intelligible senses to the phrases 'was *true* yesterday' and '*was the case* yesterday' which give the Occamist results; but I cannot find any such sense for 'was *known* yesterday.' I can cause a person's guess made yesterday to have been correct by my free choice tomorrow. I can also tomorrow verify a person's guess right now that the person's guess yesterday was indeed correct. But I don't see how these contingent futures or future-infected pasts can be known. The alleged knowledge would be no more than correct guessing. For there would be *ex hypothesi* nothing that could make it knowledge, no present ground for the guess's correctness which a specially penetrating person might perceive.[56]

Prior's point is not that God's knowing a future contingent proposition is in some sense a fact of the past more unalterable than *p*'s being true, hence vitiating Ockham's solution; but rather that while *p*'s being true might be contingent though past, nonetheless *p* cannot be known to be true, since there is no justification for the belief that *p*. This puts an entirely different complexion on Prior's reasoning, for now the issue no longer appears to be the fatalism entailed by the past truth of future contingent propositions, but the unknowability of such propositions.

Less sophisticated, but far more influential than Prior's argument has been Nelson Pike's case for theological fatalism, as presented in his "Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action" (1965) and again in *God and Timelessness* (1970). Although Pike at first confessed that his argument had a "sharp, counterintuitive ring,"[57] over the years he apparently became more entrenched in his position, despite the criticisms of many philosophers.

Pike invites us to suppose that Jones mows his lawn Saturday afternoon. Pike argues that if God knew 80 years in advance that Jones would mow his lawn Saturday afternoon, then Saturday afternoon Jones was not able, that is to say, it was not within Jones' power, to refrain from mowing his lawn. Pike admits that had Jones refrained, then God (or Yahweh, as Pike calls him in his revised article) would have believed differently. But "By the time Saturday got here, Yahweh's belief was tucked away eighty years in the past. Nothing that Jones was able to do on Saturday could have had the slightest bearing on whether Yahweh held a certain belief eighty

[56] Prior, "Formalities of Omniscience," 35–36.
[57] Nelson Pike, "Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action," *Philosophical Review* 74, no. 1 (1965): 27.

years earlier."[58] Hence, Jones did not have the power to refrain, and his action cannot be counted as voluntary.

The key premise in Pike's argument attempts to foreclose escape routes from the fatalistic conclusion:

> 24. If God believed that Jones would mow his lawn on Saturday afternoon, Jones can refrain from mowing his lawn only if one of the following alternatives is true:
> **(i)** Jones has the power to make God's belief false;
> **(ii)** Jones has the power to erase God's past belief;
> **(iii)** Jones has the power to erase God's past existence.

But each of these options is impossible and so unavailing.

Pike believes that theological fatalism may be avoided by maintaining that God and truth are timeless. In his first piece, Pike appears to call into question the intelligibility of the claim "It was true at t_1 that E would occur at t_2." It makes sense, he opines, to suppose that God held a true belief prior to Saturday. "But this is not to suppose that *what* God believed *was true 80 years prior to Saturday*."[59] The point is apparently that the relevant propositions are timelessly true. In his second piece, Pike disputes Prior's comment that while it is intelligible to maintain that a future contingent proposition was true yesterday, it is not intelligible to hold that it was known yesterday. Prior incorrectly assumes that foreknowledge is like a prediction based on evidence, when it is in fact a "noninferential, visionary knowledge."[60] So understood, foreknowledge does not imply that "Jones does A at t_2" was true at t_1. According to Pike, it is "obscuristic [*sic*] and strange" to date the truth value of a proposition in which the date is assigned to the event.[61] "Of course, if 'Jones does A at T_2' is true, then it must be known (infallibly believed) at T_1 by an omniscient being. This is not to say that it is true at T_1–it means only that it is believed (or known) at T_1."[62] I think we may take Pike's position to be that tenseless propositions outfitted with dates are timelessly true and that therefore it is incorrect to say that such a proposition p is true at t_n; but if it is the case that God at t_n believes p, then this infallible belief is all that the argument for theological fatalism presupposes.

Similarly, if God is timeless, then there is no infallible belief about Jones' activity prior to that activity. Pike points out that Jones does have the

[58] Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 58.
[59] Pike, "Divine Omniscience," 36.
[60] Pike, *God and Timelessness,* 71.
[61] Pike, 71.
[62] Pike, 71.

power to act at t_2 such that God would not believe as he will in fact believe at a later time t_3. In such a case Jones could act otherwise, but he simply will not. By contrast, when God's belief is in the past, Jones does not have the power to act such that God would not have believed as he did in fact believe. Pike therefore agrees with Boethius that if God is timeless, he simply "sees" and believes whatever Jones is doing, and Jones has the power to perform an action other than that which he is performing, so that God's belief would be other than what it in fact is.

Pike argues that Prior's position (that foreknowledge does not exist and that God is temporal) reduces to absurdity because human agents often have foreknowledge, which Prior's position would preclude. Pike argues that human foreknowledge does not entail fatalism as does divine foreknowledge. His point of departure is Augustine's contention that foreknowledge does not entail fatalism because an intimate friend may have foreknowledge of one's voluntary actions without thereby removing one's freedom. It is Pike's contention that the case of the intimate friend differs essentially from the case of God's foreknowledge. He asks us to imagine that Smith knew at t_1 that Jones would do A at t_2. It follows from this that Jones did in fact do A at t_2. Nevertheless, it was still in Jones' power to refrain from A at t_2. For although Smith's belief at t_1 was in fact true, it might have turned out to be false. This is because Jones had the power at t_2 to refrain; he simply did not exercise it. But the same cannot be said with regard to God's belief, since we cannot say that God's belief was in fact true but might have been false. In God's case alone is truth analytically connected with belief.[63] Thus, in Smith's case there are really two contingencies: that Smith held a certain belief and that that belief was true. Jones can act to falsify the second contingency, not the first. Since in God's case the second contingency does not exist, Jones cannot falsify God's belief and is therefore not free to do otherwise than as God believed.

Pike thinks that the crucial factor in the difference between Smith and God is that God is not merely in fact omniscient, but essentially omniscient. In Pike's opinion, if we were to hold that God is merely in fact omniscient, but not essentially omniscient, then his knowledge would not differ from Smith's and fatalism would be escaped. If an individual is God, states Pike, it is necessary that he be omniscient; but he need not be necessarily omniscient in the sense of essentially omniscient.

Pike's conclusion would thus appear to be that fatalism is entailed by the foreknowledge of a temporal, essentially omniscient God and that the best escape from this conclusion is to be found in either ascribing

[63] Pike, "Divine Omniscience," 44–45.

timelessness to God and truth or in denying God's essential, as opposed to contingent, omniscience. Since Pike later objects to divine timelessness on other grounds, we may presume that he prefers the second option.

More recently, David Hunt has formulated an expansive version of the argument for theological fatalism in order to make plain its many vulnerabilities.[64] In Hunt's hands the argument attempts to show the incompatibility of two assumptions:

> *The God Assumption*: (i) God is omniscient (if *p*, then God knows that *p*); (ii) God is essentially inerrant or *infallible* (necessarily, if God believes that *p*, then *p*); and (iii) God exists eternally (there is no time such that the proposition *God exists*, if asserted at that time, is false).
>
> *The Freedom Assumption*: Someone sometime does something freely.

Let t_1, t_2, and t_3 be three sequential moments of time. Suppose that someone *X* performs an action *A* at t_3. Then

> (25) It is true at t_1 that *X* will do *A* at t_3. (The Omnitemporality of Truth)
>
> (26) God knows at t_1 that *X* will do *A* at t_3. (25, God Assumption (i) and (iii))
>
> (27) God believes at t_1 that *X* will do *A* at t_3. (26, Analysis of Knowledge: for all *X*, *X knows that p* entails *X believes that p*)
>
> (28) It is "temporally necessary" at t_2 that God believed at t_1 that *X* will do *A* at t_3. (27, Necessity of the Past)
>
> (29) It is "temporally necessary" at t_2 that *X* will do *A* at t_3. (28, God Assumption (ii), Transfer Principle)
>
> (30) *X* cannot refrain from doing *A* at t_3. (28, Incompatibilist Analysis of "Can")
>
> (31) *X* does not do *A* at t_3 freely. (30, Principle of Alternate Possibilities)

So if the God Assumption is true, the Freedom Assumption is false.

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[64] What follows is from the pre-print of our published article, William Lane Craig and David P. Hunt, "Perils of the Open Road," *Faith and Philosophy* 30, no. 1 (2013): 49–71, which had to be seriously abbreviated due to space constraints. Similar formulations can be found in David P. Hunt, "Foreknowledge and Freedom, Theological Problem of," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* 2nd ed., ed. Donald M. Borchert (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006), 3: 692–697; David P. Hunt, "Theological Fatalism as an Aporetic Problem," in *Free Will and Classical Theism: The Significance of Freedom in Perfect Being Theology*, ed. Hugh J. McCann (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 23–41; David P. Hunt, "Fatalism for Presentists," in *The Metaphysics of Time: Themes from Prior,* ed. Per Hasle, David Jakobsen, and Peter Øhrstrom (Aalborg, Denmark: Aalborg University Press, 2020), 299–316.

The elaborateness of Hunt's formulation of the argument for theological fatalism is intended to reveal that "there are far more points at which it could go wrong than one might have supposed. Indeed, every one of its assumptions has been challenged by one notable critic or another."[65] Aristotle rejected (25) in *De Interpretatione* 9. Boethius is associated with the rejection of (26), Aquinas with the rejection of (27), Ockham with (28), Scotus with (29), Jonathan Edwards with (30), and Augustine with (31). Hunt reflects, "There's an embarrassment of riches here for The Argument's critics."[66] Detractors of divine foreknowledge want us to deny (25), but we have seen that this escape route is not only unbiblical but comes at considerable cost; therefore other alternatives should be explored.

6.3.2.1.2 Reduction of Theological to Logical Fatalism

In the argument for theological fatalism premise

21. Necessarily (If God knows *p,* then *p*).

is clearly true. It is perhaps worth noting that this is the case, not because of God's essential omniscience or infallibility, but simply in virtue of the definition of "knowledge." Since knowledge entails true belief, anybody's knowing that *x* will happen necessarily implies that *x* will happen. Thus, we could replace (21) and (22′) with

21*. Necessarily, if Smith correctly believes that *x* will happen, then *x* will happen.

22*. Necessarily, Smith correctly believes that *x* will happen.

And (23) will follow as before. Therefore, if any person ever holds true beliefs about the future (and surely we do, as we smugly remind others when we say, "I told you so!"), then, given the truth of premise (22*), fatalism follows from merely human beliefs, a curious conclusion!

Indeed, as ancient Greek fatalists realized, the presence of any agent at all is really superfluous to the argument. All one needs is a true, future-tense proposition to get the argument going. Thus, we could replace (21) and (22′) with

21**. Necessarily, if it is true that *x* will happen, then *x* will happen.

22**. Necessarily, it is true that *x* will happen.

And we shall get (23) as our conclusion.

[65] Craig and Hunt, pre-print of "Perils."
[66] Craig and Hunt, 52.

In order to avoid the above generalization of their argument to all persons and to mere propositions about the future, theological fatalists will deny that the second premise is true with respect to humans or mere propositions, as it is for God. They will say that Smith's holding a true belief or some future-tense proposition's being true are not necessary in the way that God's holding a belief is necessary.

That raises the question as to whether premise (22′) is true. Now at face value, premise (22′) seems obviously false. Christian theology has always maintained that God's creation of the world is a free act, that God could have created a different world, in which *x* does not occur, or even no world at all. To say that God *necessarily* foreknows any event *x* implies that this is the only world God could have created and thus denies divine freedom.

But theological fatalists have a different sort of necessity in mind when they say that God's foreknowledge is necessary. What they are talking about is *temporal necessity,* or the necessity of the past. Often this is expressed by saying that the past is unpreventable or unchangeable. If some event is in the past, then it is now too late to do anything to affect it. It is in that sense necessary. Since God's foreknowledge of future events is now part of the past, it is now fixed and unalterable. Therefore, given God's free creation of this particular world, it is said, premise (22′) is true.

But if premise (22′) is true in that sense, then why are not (22*) and (22**) true as well? The theological fatalist will respond that Smith's belief's being true or a future-tense proposition's being true are not facts or events of the past, as is God's holding a belief about something.

But such an understanding of what constitutes a fact or event seems quite counter-intuitive. If Smith believed in 1997 that *Clinton will be impeached*, Smith held a true belief at that time. So was it not a fact that Smith's belief was true? If Smith still held that same belief today (viz., *Clinton will be impeached*), would it not be a fact that Smith's belief is no longer true? If Smith's belief thus changes from being true to being false, then surely it was a fact that his belief was then true and it is a fact that his belief is now false. The same obviously goes for the mere proposition *Clinton will be impeached*. This proposition once had the property of being true and now has the property of being false. In any reasonable sense of "fact," these are past and present facts.

Indeed, a proposition's having a truth value is plausibly an event as well. This is most obvious with respect to propositions like *Flight 4750 to Paris will depart in five minutes*. That proposition is false up until five minutes prior to departure, becomes true at five minutes till, and then becomes false again immediately thereafter. Other propositions' being true may be more long-lasting events, like *Flight 4750 to Paris will depart within the next*

hour. Such propositions' being true are clearly events on any reasonable construal of what constitutes an event.

Theological fatalists have not adequately addressed the question of the nature of facts or events in order to make it plausible that Smith's correctly believing a future-tense proposition and a future-tense proposition's being true do not count as past facts or events. But then we see that theological fatalism is not inherently theological at all. If the theological fatalist's reasoning is correct, it can be generalized to show that every time we hold a true belief about the future or even make a statement about the future which is true, then the future is fated to occur – surely an incredible inference!

Therefore I am disposed to agree with both Richard Taylor (a fatalist) and Susan Haack (a non-fatalist) that theological fatalism is just a dressed-up form of ancient Greek logical fatalism, which was based on the simple fact that certain future-tense statements are true. According to Taylor, an omniscient God can be incorporated into the argument to convey the reasoning more easily to the unphilosophical mind, but such an assumption contributes nothing to the cogency of the argument.[67] Haack calls the argument for theological fatalism "a needlessly (and confusingly) elaborated version" of Greek fatalism; the addition of an omniscient God to the argument constitutes a "gratuitous detour" around the real issue, which is the truth or falsity of future-tense statements.[68]

This insight is important, for it takes the onus off the Christian systematic theologian who on the basis of biblical teaching holds to divine foreknowledge of future contingents. The issue is much broader and must concern anyone who holds future-tense statements about free decisions to be either true or false. For if the fatalist's reasoning is correct, the mere truth of future-tense statements about future free acts implies that these acts happen necessarily.

6.3.2.1.3 Unintelligibility of Fatalism

Before we examine the argument for theological fatalism more closely, it is worth observing that fatalism is intuitively unintelligible, and therefore the argument in support of it must be fallacious. One is reminded in this connection of Zeno's paradoxes of motion. The ancient Greek philosopher Zeno of Elea concocted a number of ingenious arguments to prove that motion is impossible and hence illusory. Scarcely anyone has thought that Zeno was right, since things are obviously in motion. Nevertheless, his

[67] Richard Taylor, "Fatalism," *Philosophical Review* 71 (1962): 57; see also his *Metaphysics*, Foundations of Philosophy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 57.
[68] Susan Haack, "On a Theological Argument for Fatalism," *Philosophical Quarterly* 24, no. 95 (1974): 158.

paradoxes proved to be most intractable, and philosophers have continued to propose solutions to them right up through the twentieth century.

In the same way, no matter how ingenious the argument, fatalism must be wrong. For it posits a constraint upon human freedom which is altogether unintelligible. The fatalist admits that our decisions and actions may be causally free – indeed, they could be utterly uncaused. Nevertheless, such actions are said to be constrained – but by what? Fate? What, pray, is that? How can my action be constrained and my power limited merely by the truth of a future-tense statement about it, especially when my action is causally unconstrained?

Suppose God knows that some causally indeterminate event will occur. How does his merely knowing about it constrain it to occur? Suppose that we erase divine foreknowledge from the picture. The theological fatalist would now say that the event in question is not constrained or fated to occur. But what has changed? How does the addition or deletion of the fact of God's simply knowing some act in advance affect the freedom of that act? Thomas Flint aptly calls this "the epiphenomenal character of foreknowledge."[69] It cannot constrain anything.

William Hasker replies that in the case of divine foreknowledge, God's foreknowing that an event *E* will happen *logically precludes E*'s failing to happen, so that there is a non-causal, logical constraint upon any agents involved in the production of *E*.[70] But as Alfred Freddoso points out, insofar as we can make sense of logical constraints, they are not analogous to the sort of necessitation imagined by the theological fatalist.[71] For example, given the fact that Jones has already played basketball at least once in his life, it is now impossible for him to play basketball for the first time. But this sort of constraint is not at all analogous to theological fatalism. For in the case we are envisioning, it is within Jones' power to play basketball or not. Whether he has played before or not, he can freely execute the actions of playing basketball. It is just that if he has played before, his actions will not *count* as playing for the first time. By contrast the fatalist imagines that if God knows that Jones will not play basketball, then even though Jones is causally free, his actions are mysteriously constrained so that he is literally unable to walk out onto the court, dribble, and shoot. But such non-causal determinism is utterly opaque and unintelligible.

The argument for fatalism therefore must be unsound. Since premise (21) is clearly true, the trouble must lie with premise (22′).

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[69] Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 45.

[70] William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), chap. 7.

[71] Alfred J. Freddoso, review of *God, Time, and Knowledge*, by William Hasker, *Faith and Philosophy* 10, no. 1 (1993): 104.

6.3.2.1.4 The Necessity of the Past

Indeed, premise

22′. Necessarily (God knows *p*).

is notoriously problematic. For the notion of temporal necessity appealed to by the fatalist is so obscure a concept that (22′) becomes a veritable mare's nest of philosophical difficulties. For example, since the necessity of (21) is logical necessity and the necessity of (22′) is temporal necessity, why think that such mixing of different kinds of modality is valid? If the fatalist answers that logical necessity entails temporal necessity, so that premise (1) can be construed merely in terms of temporal necessity, then how do we know that temporal necessity is closed under entailment, so that such necessity is passed on from the premises to the conclusion, in the way that logical necessity is? Indeed, since *x* is supposed to be a future event, how *could* the conclusion be temporally necessary? And even if it is temporally necessary, how do we know that this sort of necessity is incompatible with an action's being free? So long as a person's choice is causally undetermined, it is a free choice even if he is unable to choose the opposite of that choice.[72] So even if *x* were temporally necessary, such that not-*x* cannot occur, it is far from obvious that *x* is not freely performed or chosen. As Hunt's expanded formulation of the argument for theological fatalism makes clear, not merely (28), but (29), (30), and (31) have all been challenged by prominent critics.

All of the above problems arise even if we concede (22′) to be true. But why think that this premise is true? What is temporal necessity anyway, and why think that God's past beliefs are now temporally necessary?

The most sophisticated analysis of temporal necessity, or, as he prefers, accidental necessity, comes from the pen of Freddoso.[73] He alleges that previous attempts to formulate a convincing account of temporal necessity have failed primarily because they have not articulated precisely the thesis

[72] See Harry Frankfurt, "Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," *Journal of Philosophy* 66, no. 23 (1969): 829–839; Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 151–152. We are to imagine a man with electrodes secretly implanted in his brain who is presented with the choice of doing either A or B. The electrodes are inactive so long as the man chooses A; but if he were going to choose B, then the electrodes would switch on and force him to choose A. In such a case the man is unable to choose B, but his choosing A is still entirely free, since the electrodes do not function at all when he chooses to do A. For an application of the scenario to theological fatalism see David P. Hunt, "On Augustine's Way Out," *Faith and Philosophy* 16, no. 1 (1999): 3–26.

[73] Alfred J. Freddoso, "Accidental Necessity and Logical Determinism," *Journal of Philosophy* 80 (1983): 257–278; see also his "Accidental Necessity and Power over the Past," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 63 (1982): 54–68.

of the metaphysical primacy of the pure present and have not distinguished clearly between temporal and causal necessity.

He begins by listing four basic properties of temporal necessity: (i) The necessity of a temporally necessary proposition is accidental to it; hence, only logically contingent propositions can be temporally necessary or impossible. (ii) A proposition's being temporally necessary/impossible is relative to a time, such that for any moment *t* logically contingent propositions may be divided into three jointly exhaustive and mutually exclusive groups: those which are temporally necessary at *t*, those temporally impossible at *t*, and those temporally contingent at *t*. (iii) A proposition's being temporally necessary/impossible at *t* entails that it remains so at every moment after *t*, so that no agent has it within his power to make a temporally necessary proposition false or a temporally impossible proposition true. (iv) When we limit the consequents to logically contingent propositions, temporal necessity is closed under entailment, that is, if *p* is temporally necessary at t, and *p* entails *q* and *q* is logically contingent, and then *q* is temporally necessary at *t*. Given that no one can have the power to make a logically necessary proposition false, it follows from (iii) and (iv) that if *p* is temporally necessary at *t*, and *p* entails *q*, then no one has the power at or after *t* to bring it about that *q* is or will be false.

The heart of the matter, then, is to delineate which propositions are temporally necessary at any moment. Freddoso proposes the following formulation of temporal necessity for any proposition *p* true at time *t* in a possible world *W*:

> TN. *p* is temporally necessary at (*W, t*) iff (i) *p* is logically contingent and (ii) *p* is true at *t* and at every moment after *t* in every world *W** such that *W** shares the same history with *W* at *t*.

The critical notion in this definition is that of two worlds' sharing the same history at *t*. Freddoso suggests that we take this to mean that two worlds *W* and *W** have identical series of $t_i<t$ and that for any submoment *k* and time $t_n<t$, *k* obtains at (W, t_n) iff *k* obtains at (W^*, t_n). In order to understand this explanation, one must define the notion of a submoment. A submoment for any (*W, t*) is the set of immediate propositions true at (*W, t*). An immediate proposition *p* must be (i) an atomic, non-quantified, present-tense proposition and (ii) temporally indifferent, such that either (a) *p* is not logically contingent or (b) it is possible that *p*, as well as its negation, be true at a first, a last, or an intermediate moment of time. The intuitive justification behind construing "two worlds' sharing the same history" in terms of their having identical submoments Freddoso calls the metaphysical primacy

of the pure present. This is the intuition that a future-tense proposition is true now because the appropriate present-tense proposition will be true in the future. There is an asymmetrical dependence of the truth-values of future- and past-tense propositions on the future and past truth-values of the appropriate present-tense propositions.

Freddoso summarizes his view,

> I take the claim that the pure present is metaphysically primary to be tantamount to the assertion that for any moment *t* and any logically possible world *w* there is a set *k* of purely present-tense propositions such that (a) each member of *k* is true at *t* in *w* and (b) *k* determines what is true at *t* in *w* in a temporally independent way, i.e., in a way which does not temporally depend on what has been or will be true at moments of *w* other than *t*. I will call this set the submoment of *t* in *w*, and I will say that a given submoment obtains when and only when each of its members is true. . . . two worlds share the same history at a moment *t* just in case they share all and only the same submoments, obtaining in exactly the same order, prior to *t*. Finally, . . . a proposition *p* is necessary *per accidens* at *t* in *w* just in case *p* is true at *t* and at every moment after *t* in every possible world which shares the same history (in the above sense) with *w* at *t*.[74]

On this basis, Freddoso is able to elude the argument of logical fatalism based on the temporal necessity of an antecedently true future-tense proposition. For while, for example, the proposition *Socrates drank hemlock* is now temporally necessary, since *Socrates drinks hemlock* is a member of a past submoment which obtains prior to the present in any world sharing the same history prior to the present with our world, a proposition like *Katie will wash her car* is not a member of any submoment, though if it is true it has always been the case that she will wash her car. There are therefore other worlds sharing identical histories with our world in which *Katie will wash her car* is at no time true. Hence, this proposition, even if true, is not temporally necessary, and so the argument for logical fatalism fails.

Now in assessing Freddoso's proposal, it is important to dispel at once the impression that by a world's history prior to *t* Freddoso means the temporal series of events prior to *t*. Freddoso's submoments and histories built of them are purely abstract entities constituted by propositions true at various times. Hence, it is very misleading for him to assert, "No world *w* can claim to share the same history with our world now if in *w* Chamberlain did not fear that Hitler would not keep his word, or if in *w* Ernie Banks did not

[74] Freddoso, "Logical Determinism," 266.

hope (and predict) every spring that the Cubs would win the pennant."[75] For precisely on Freddoso's account such attitudes and actions of historical agents may not be part of the world's "history." As he explains elsewhere, states of affairs involving present-tense propositional attitudes directed at future-tense propositions are not immediate if they entail the future-tense propositions involved.[76] Thus, propositions expressed by sentences like

32. God believes that Israel will be saved.

and

33. God promises that Israel will be saved.

are non-immediate and, hence, not part of any submoment. The same goes for attitudes directed at past-tense propositions, like

34. God remembers that he made a covenant with Abraham.

and

35. God assures Joseph that the king had died.

Moreover, in cases of divine revelation, the actions and attitudes of human persons cannot be counted as part of the world's history, for example,

36. Isaiah prophesies the fall of Jerusalem.

and

37. Daniel dreams that the Babylonian Empire will be overthrown.

Freddoso is thus unfair in charging the logical fatalist, who holds that the antecedent truth of future-tense propositions is part of our history, with "outrageously inflated ideas of actuality and history."[77] This same common sense appeal would with equal justice lead one to conclude that Freddoso has an outrageously emaciated concept of actuality and history. But neither the fatalist nor Freddoso is discussing the historian's history, so to speak, and so such appeals ought to be left entirely aside.

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[75] Freddoso, 268.
[76] Thomas P. Flint and Alfred J. Freddoso, "Maximal Power," in *The Existence and Nature of God,* ed. Alfred J. Freddoso (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 93, 104–107.
[77] Freddoso, "Logical Determinism," 275.

The lynch-pin in Freddoso's account is his explanation of immediacy. His explanation requires that in order for a logically contingent proposition to be immediate, it, as well as its negation, be such that is true in some possible world *W* at time *t*, where *t* is the last moment in *W*. But his explanation of the temporal indifference of an immediate proposition seems inadequate. For suppose that the toss of a penny turning up heads at t_1 is the result of backward causation by some agent at t_2. In that case the truth of

38. The toss of the penny turns up heads.

depends upon the future truth of

39. The agent acts to cause the penny to have turned up heads.

The outcome of the toss is counterfactually dependent upon the agent's action, and after the toss but prior to the agent's action it is still possible for the agent to act otherwise, such that (38) would have been false. Accordingly, (38) would seem to be non-immediate. But on Freddoso's definition, it is immediate, for there are worlds in which the penny turns up heads at t_1, and t_1 is the last moment of time. Of course, in such worlds the toss is not retroactively caused. But because (38) does not entail a future moment, even though it implies one, (38) counts as temporally indifferent. Therefore, (38) is true in every world sharing the history of our world up through t_1, and the past tense version is, hence, now that t_1 is past, temporally necessary. Yet it remains within the agent's power to bring it about that (38) is false. Freddoso's account of immediacy and temporal indifference thus allows a proposition counterfactually dependent on a future event to be temporally necessary. What sort of necessity is this?

Freddoso himself states that his account presupposes the logical impossibility of time travel.[78] He explains that proponents of time travel assert in effect that few propositions are temporally necessary because it is within the power of the time traveler to render true past-tense propositions false. He could, for example, return to Socrates' death scene and prevent his drinking the poison. Of course, we know that he will not exercise such power, but nonetheless he does have this power. Were he to exercise this power, the past would have been different than it was. Hence, virtually no past-tense propositions would be temporally necessary.

Now if Freddoso is correct in his judgement that time travel is incompatible with temporal necessity, then he should also have presupposed the

[78] Freddoso, "Logical Determinism," 260; Flint and Freddoso, "Maximal Power," 89–90.

metaphysical impossibility of backward causation and precognition as well, for these have precisely the same implications for the past as time travel.[79] For example, Ernie Banks' springtime delusions could have been retroactively caused by some later mad sportswriter bent on humiliating the Cubs. It is within his power to do the same to Ron Santo, though we know he does not exercise this power. Again, Chamberlain's fears could have been precognitions of Hitler's invidious acts. Hitler, by refraining from the invasion of Poland, could thus have acted in such a way that Chamberlain would never have entertained such fears. It is interesting to note, then, that in Freddoso's understanding, one cannot accept the possibility of time travel, backward causation, and precognition and hold to the temporal necessity of most past-tense propositions.

But it might be asked whether Freddoso is not asking us to presuppose too much. For even if we reject time travel, backward causation, and a retrocausal account of precognition as metaphysically impossible, still one cannot so dismiss non-retrocausal theories of precognition. More importantly, not only would precognition be incompatible with Freddoso's account, but, as we shall see, so would divine foreknowledge. Time travel and divine foreknowledge are remarkably parallel in their implications, and so it is here: if time travel is incompatible with temporal necessity, then so is divine foreknowledge.

But is Freddoso in fact correct that his account presupposes the impossibility of time travel? It seems to me that he is not. Freddoso never explains at any length precisely where the incompatibility between time travel and temporal necessity arises. It might be thought that his explanation of immediacy and temporal indifference is undercut by time travel. The truth of any past-tense proposition (say, *Socrates drank hemlock*) could depend upon the future truth of some other proposition (say, *The time traveler does not visit Greece*) and, one might think, cannot therefore be temporally necessary. This would, however, be a misinterpretation. *Socrates drank hemlock* is now temporally necessary just in case *Socrates drinks hemlock* is a member of a past submoment which obtained prior to the present in every world sharing our same history prior to the present. On Freddoso's account, a proposition, or its negation, must entail a future (or past) moment in order for it not to be temporally indifferent. But clearly *Socrates drinks hemlock* does not entail any other moment of time and is therefore temporally indifferent. Indeed, even propositions concerning events which are *de facto* dependent upon a time traveler's acts are temporally indifferent. Suppose, for example, that in the actual world it was the time traveler who poisoned

[79] See chap. 6 of my *Divine Foreknowledge*.

Socrates. In that case, *Socrates drinks hemlock* depends for its truth-value upon the future truth of certain propositions about the time traveler's actions; nevertheless, this proposition is still temporally indifferent, since it is true in some possible world at a last moment of time, a world in which the poison is not supplied by any time traveler. Of course, some propositions about time travel will not be temporally indifferent, for example, *Socrates was killed by a time traveler*. But in general, there is no reason to think that the possibility of time travel undermines Freddoso's account of immediacy. This is doubly true for the possibility of divine foreknowledge: even propositions about events wrought by God in virtue of his foreknowledge, like *Jesus is born*, are temporally indifferent, since there are worlds in which such events occur at a last moment of time, not being wrought due to foreknowledge of coming events.

Thus, it is not Freddoso's account proper which is incompatible with the possibility of time travel or divine foreknowledge. We may grant that such possibilities obtain and are operative in the actual world and still hold pretty much the same propositions to be temporally necessary as we should if these notions were presupposed to be impossible. Rather the problem is that temporal necessity then becomes altogether trivial with respect to what is or is not within one's power. If time travel and divine foreknowledge exist, then it is still the case that if a proposition is temporally necessary at *t*, then it remains temporally necessary at every moment thereafter. But it is not true that no agent therefore has it within his power to make a temporally necessary proposition false. For we are allowing the possibility of time travel and divine foreknowledge, which imply that although some proposition is temporally necessary, still it lies within one's power to act in such a way that were one so to act, that proposition would have been false. Suppose, for example, that it is true that

40. Banks predicted a Cubs' pennant in 1966.

The present-tense version of (40) is immediate and a member of a submoment. Hence, (40) is now temporally necessary. Nonetheless, a time traveler has it within his power to journey into the past and prevent Banks' prediction. Similarly, perhaps God would have prevented his prediction had he foreknown that the Cubs would win in 1966. The 1966 Cubs team therefore had it within its power, by winning the pennant (remember, this is purely hypothetical!), to bring it about that Banks had not made such a prediction. So the notion of temporal necessity does not itself presuppose the impossibility of time travel or divine foreknowledge; rather temporal necessity just does not amount to much once these are granted. Even if we

have good grounds for assuming the metaphysical impossibility of backward causation and, hence, of time travel, we have no such grounds for rejecting divine foreknowledge and so are left with a temporal necessity which seems inconsequential.

Now if it seems peculiar to call propositions temporally necessary which we may render false, perhaps one ought to reconsider one's definition of temporal necessity. I suggested that it seems odd that propositions about events which are counterfactually dependent upon future events as their conditions should be called temporally necessary. Why could we not, therefore, reinterpret Freddoso's account of temporal indifference in such a way that an atomic, present-tense, non-quantified, logically contingent proposition *p* is temporally indifferent iff *p* is true and *p* would be true even if the future were annihilated? Under such an interpretation a proposition concerning events which are in fact consequences of future events, such that were the latter not to be, the former would not have been, is not temporally indifferent and therefore neither immediate nor a member of a submoment and therefore not temporally necessary. If we agree that backward causation is metaphysically impossible, then we may nonetheless hold that divine foreknowledge exists and maintain that only temporally contingent propositions lie within one's power to falsify. For we can falsify propositions concerning past events only if such events would not be wrought by God were we to act differently. Other events would remain unaffected by our actions, and, hence, propositions about them cannot in fact be falsified.

On the basis of our *Auseinandersetzung* with Freddoso we seem prepared to make sense of the popular distinction between future-dependent ("soft") and non-future dependent ("hard") facts about the past. A fact is soft iff it is a past or present event or actuality which is counterfactually dependent upon some future event or actuality in such a way that the earlier event or actuality is a consequence of which the later event or actuality is the condition. A fact is hard iff it is a past or present event or actuality which is not so dependent. The use of the terms "consequence" and "condition" indicates that one is not speaking here of logical conditions, but of conditions in the asymmetrical sense of counterfactual dependence.[80] To say that a past fact is soft entails the claim that were some future condition to be other than it will be, then that past fact would as a consequence have been different than it was. By contrast, to say that a past fact is hard is to say that no matter how future conditions might vary, the past fact would have been the same in every case. Whether a fact is hard or soft will determine whether a proposition about it is temporally necessary or contingent.

[80] See Roger Wertheimer, "Conditions," *Journal of Philosophy* 65 (1968): 355–364.

We can, then, on the basis of our prior discussion state that a proposition is temporally necessary iff it expresses a hard fact and temporally contingent iff it expresses a soft fact. Propositions thus become temporally necessary once all future conditions on which they are counterfactually dependent become hard facts themselves.

Now consider

41. God believed that *p*.

where *p* is a future-tense proposition about some future event. Is (41) temporally necessary? The answer, as we have seen repeatedly, is, no. For God's belief is counterfactually dependent upon and conditioned by the events or actualities described in *p*, such that if these were different, then God's belief would have been different. The claim that God's beliefs about the future are hard facts and that (41) is therefore temporally necessary is without foundation.

This construal of temporal necessity has the consequence that which facts of the past are hard and which soft is a merely factual matter and that for all we know, given God's foreknowledge and freedom of action, virtually every fact about the past is soft. That is to say, "hardness" and "softness" are not dispositional properties of facts, but simply characterize things *de facto*. Past facts are either hard or soft, depending on whether they are counterfactually dependent on future events or actualities; the problem is that there is no empirically manifest property of hard facts that serves to mark them off from soft facts. There may well be a great many facts of the past which are hard and which God would not have failed to actualize no matter what course the future were to take. Accordingly, propositions about such facts are temporally necessary. Of course, only God knows – or those to whom he chooses to reveal it – which facts of the past are hard or soft and accordingly which propositions are temporally necessary or contingent. But this ignorance on our part is no reason for denying that some facts about the past really are hard facts – we simply lack the knowledge of God's motives and reasons for doing things so as to ascertain what he would have done differently should some future event not occur.

By contrast theological fatalists have never provided an adequate account of this peculiar temporal modality. I have yet to see an explanation of temporal necessity, according to which God's past beliefs are temporally necessary, which does not reduce to either the *unalterability* or the *causal closedness* of the past.

But interpreting the necessity of the past as its unalterability (or unchangeability or unpreventability) is clearly inadequate, since the future,

by definition, is just as unalterable as the past. By definition the future is what will occur, and the past is what has occurred. To *change* the future would be to bring it about that an event which will occur will not occur, which is self-contradictory. It is purely a matter of definition that the past and future cannot be changed, and no fatalistic conclusion follows from this truth. We need not be able to *change* the future in order to *determine* the future. If our actions are freely performed, then it lies within our power to determine causally what the course of future events will be, even if we do not have the power to change the future.

The fatalist may insist that the past is necessary in the sense that we do not have a similar ability to causally determine the past. We may happily concede the point: given the objectivity of tense and temporal becoming, backward causation is metaphysically impossible. But the causal closedness of the past does not imply fatalism. For freedom to refrain from doing as God knows one will do does not involve backward causation. One may happily admit that there is nothing I can now do to cause or bring about the past. Thus, I cannot cause God to have had in the past a certain belief about my future actions. But it may well lie within my power to freely perform some action *A*, and if *A* were to occur, then the past would have been different than it in fact is.[81] Suppose, for example, that God has always believed that in the year 2012 Barack Obama would accept his party's nomination to run for a second term. Let us suppose that up until the time arrived Obama had the ability to accept or refuse the nomination. If he were to refuse the nomination, then God would have held a different belief than the one he has in fact held. For if Obama were to refuse the nomination, then different future-tense propositions would have been true, and God, being omniscient, would have known this. Thus, he would have had different foreknowledge than that which he in fact has. The relation between one's action and a corresponding future-tense proposition about it is not a causal relation. Neither is the relation between a true future-tense proposition and God's believing it a causal relation. Thus,

[81] In his review of Hasker's book, Freddoso says that we may concede that "God's infallible beliefs about future contingents are part of the accidentally necessary past" but deny that "they thereby deprive free agents of the power (in the sense required for freedom) to do otherwise."

> *"pace*. . . the Ockhamists, this is not to say that Peter has the power. . . to bring it about that God never had the belief in question; after all, God's having had that belief is now accidentally necessary. Rather, what Peter has is the power. . . to do something. . . such that if he had been going to do it in the relevant circumstances, then God would have known from eternity, via his middle knowledge, that Peter would freely [do it] if situated in those circumstances. Thus, God's middle knowledge and free knowledge, though not directly brought about by what Peter will freely do, are nonetheless 'counterfactually sensitive' to what he will freely do" (Freddoso, critical notice of *God, Time, and Knowledge*, p. 103).

Freddoso's description of Ockhamism is, I think, unnecessarily strong; the Ockhamist would embrace the counterfactual solution ascribed to the Molinist, but without the supporting theory of middle knowledge.

the causal closedness of the past is irrelevant. If temporal necessity is merely the causal closedness of the past, then it is insufficient to support fatalism.

Typically, would-be fatalists just appeal gratuitously to some sort of "Fixed Past Principle" to the effect that it is not within my power to act in such a way, that if I were to do so, then the past would have been different–which begs the question. On analyses of temporal necessity which are not reducible to either the unalterability or the causal closedness of the past, such as Freddoso's, God's past beliefs always turn out *not* to be temporally necessary. It is interesting that precisely parallel conclusions follow with respect to past events in cases of backward causation, time travel, precognition, the Special Theory of Relativity, and Newcomb's Paradox, which provide intriguing analogues to God's holding beliefs about future contingents.[82] It would be tragic if theologians were to accept fatalistic reasoning in theology which has been rejected as unsound in other fields of inquiry.

So, returning at length to Pike's argument for theological fatalism, we can see that Pike failed to exhaust the alternatives available to the biblical theist. We may amend Pike's key premise to read:

> 24′. So if God believed that Jones would mow his lawn on Saturday afternoon, Jones can refrain from mowing his lawn only if one of the following alternatives is true:
> **(i)** Jones has the power to make God's belief false;
> **(ii)** Jones has the power to erase God's past belief;
> **(iii)** Jones has the power to erase God's past existence; or
> **(iv)** Jones has the power to act in a different way, and if he were to act in that way, God would have believed differently.

We may thus admit that Jones cannot make God's belief false or erase God's past belief or existence. But he can do something different (from what he will do) in such a way that God would have held a belief different from the belief he in fact holds. For example, Jones can choose to go golfing on Saturday afternoon instead of mowing his lawn. Now since God foreknows that Jones will mow his lawn, we know that Jones will in fact mow the lawn rather than go golfing. But it does not follow that Jones must mow the lawn or that he lacks the power to go golfing. He can go golfing, but he merely will not. If he were to go golfing, then God would have foreknown that instead.

This solution is very similar to the one that Pike himself suggests with regard to human foreknowledge of free actions. It will be remembered that,

[82] See discussion in my *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), chaps. 7–10, and my *Divine Foreknowledge*, chaps. 6, 10.

according to Pike, Jones has the power to act in such a way that, if he were to do so, Smith's belief about Jones' action would have been false, though it is in fact true. From the fact that Smith really knows that Jones will mow his lawn, it follows only that Jones will mow his lawn, not that he must mow his lawn. If he were to refrain, as he is in fact able to do, Smith's actual knowledge would have been just a false belief.

Now Pike thinks this same solution is inapplicable in God's case because Jones does not have the power to act in such a way that God's actual knowledge would have been false belief, since God's knowledge is infallible. Pike is certainly correct that God's infallibility prevents his holding a false belief. But that same infallibility guarantees that if Jones were to refrain, God would have held a different belief. Since God cannot be mistaken, he would have foreknown from eternity if Jones were going to refrain. If Jones were to act differently, God's true belief would not have been false (as in Smith's case); rather his belief would have been different. The solution to the problem is essentially the same in both cases – namely, from Smith's and God's foreknowledge it follows only that Jones will act in a certain way, not that he must act in that way. If he were to refrain, something that is in fact the case would have been otherwise. The only difference between the two is that Smith's actual knowledge would have been false belief, while God's belief would have been different.

Pike apparently thought that Jones' power to act differently, as envisioned in alternative (iv) above, implies that Jones has the power to erase God's past belief and to substitute another one for it. But this is a misunderstanding of the alternative. Once God's foreknowledge exists in the past (or present), it is unalterable and immutable. Rather alternative (iv) asserts that if Jones were to refrain (as he is really able to do), then God would have always foreknown differently. The subjunctive mood of the relevant verbs in (iv) serves to indicate the counterfactual dependence of God's past belief upon Jones' future actions.

From God's foreknowledge that Jones will mow the lawn, we may infer with absolute certainty that Jones will mow the lawn. But he still has the power to refrain. He merely will not exercise that power. If he were to refrain (contrary to fact), then God would have foreknown that he would refrain. Thus Jones does not have the power to erase God's past belief; rather he has the power to act in a different way, and if he were so to act, God from eternity would have held a belief different from the one he in fact holds.

Thus, the argument for theological fatalism is unsound. Revisionist theologians must look elsewhere for philosophical support of their denial of divine foreknowledge, for fatalism provides no cogent basis on which to deny the biblical doctrine of divine foreknowledge of future contingents.

6.3.2.2 The Basis of Divine Foreknowledge

Arthur Prior, it will be remembered, conceded in the end the adequacy of an Ockhamist solution to the problem of theological fatalism, but he objected that future contingents cannot be known. This is an example of the second objection to the biblical doctrine of divine foreknowledge raised by that doctrine's detractors, namely, that there is no basis on which God can know future contingents. We shall encounter this objection once again in exploring the nature of divine eternity.[83] Here we focus on two contrasting models of divine cognition.[84]

In assessing the question of how God knows future events, it is helpful to distinguish two models of divine cognition: the *perceptualist* model and the *conceptualist* model. The perceptualist model construes divine knowledge on the analogy of sense perception: God "looks" and "sees" what is there. Such a model patently underlies the classic doctrine of *scientia visionis* of defenders of divine timelessness such as Boethius, Anselm, and Aquinas and is implicitly assumed when people speak of God's "foreseeing" the future. That Prior himself tacitly assumed such a model is evident from his complaint that in the case of a prediction of a future contingent there is "no present ground for the guess's correctness which a specially penetrating person might perceive."[85] Indeed, I should say that the implicit assumption of a perceptualist model of divine cognition underlies virtually all contemporary denials of the possibility of divine foreknowledge of future contingents. The perceptualist model of divine cognition does, indeed, encounter difficulty concerning God's knowledge of future contingents, given Prior's views about the objective reality of tense and temporal becoming, for as Scotus objected, if future events do not exist, there is nothing there to perceive.

By contrast on a conceptualist model of divine knowledge, God does not acquire his knowledge of the world by anything like perception. His knowledge of the future is not based on his "looking" ahead and "seeing" what lies in the future (a terribly anthropomorphic notion in any case). Rather, God's knowledge is intrinsic; it is more like a mind's knowledge of innate ideas. As an omniscient being, God has essentially the property of knowing all truths; there are truths about future contingents; ergo, God knows all truths concerning future contingents. So long as we are not seduced into thinking of divine foreknowledge on the model of perception, it is no longer evident why knowledge of future contingents should be impossible.

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[83] See *infra*, 292–294.
[84] See Edward J. Khamara, "Eternity and Omniscience," *Philosophical Quarterly* 24, no. 96 (1974): 212–218.
[85] Prior, "Formalities of Omniscience," 36.

Now it might be asked, "But *how* can God have innate knowledge of all truths, including truths about future contingents?" But it is difficult to make sense of this question. The very point of calling such knowledge innate is to deny that there is any means by which God acquires his knowledge, indeed, that it is appropriate to speak of God's acquiring knowledge at all. Rather, as a perfect being, a maximally great being, God simply possesses essentially knowledge of only and all truths; future contingent propositions are among the truths that there are; therefore God possesses essentially knowledge of future contingents. To ask how he can do so is just an expression of incredulity, as if one were to ask, "*How* can God be omnipotent?" or "*How* can God be morally perfect?" or "*How* can God be eternal?" He just is that way, and nothing more needs to be said. So long as we are not seduced into thinking of divine foreknowledge on the model of perception, it is no longer evident why knowledge of future contingent propositions should be impossible. A conceptualist model furnishes a perspicuous basis for God's knowledge of future contingents.

Nonetheless, there is a version of the conceptualist model which does allow us to say considerably more about the basis of God's foreknowledge of future contingents. The doctrine of so-called middle knowledge is so intriguing and theologically important that it deserves to be discussed separately. For the present we may conclude that neither of the principal objections raised against God's knowledge of future contingents is a good argument.

6.4 Middle Knowledge

6.4.1 The Doctrine of Scientia Media

Writing in the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation and the Council of Trent, the Spanish Jesuit Luis Molina formulated a doctrine which he called *scientia media* (middle knowledge). By means of this doctrine he proposed to avoid the Protestant error of denying genuine human freedom, yet without thereby sacrificing the sovereignty of God. The Council of Trent in its decree on justification (1547) had declared that the initiative in the process of justification is God's unmerited, prevenient grace, which stirs and solicits the will of man, but which may be either accepted or resisted by the human will. Anyone who denies either prevenient grace or human freedom is summarily condemned. Firmly persuaded of these truths, Molina opposed himself to what he perceived to be the central teaching of the Reformation: the denial of human freedom.

Here it must be admitted that the principal Reformers did deny to man libertarian freedom, at least in his dealings with God. Luther and Calvin were prepared to grant to man only spontaneity of choice and voluntariness of will, not the ability to choose otherwise in the circumstances in which an agent finds himself. Luther's denial of freedom of the will was predicated on what he perceived to be the incompatibility of such freedom with God's foreknowledge and omnipotence. According to Luther, since God's foreknowledge is certain and infallible and since God can bring about whatever he wills, it follows that whatever he foreknows and wills happens necessarily.[86] Calvin, on the other hand, did not argue that in virtue of divine prescience everything happens necessarily. Rather, his denial of human freedom grew out of his doctrine of divine providence. In Calvin's view, God's providence is universal and total, so that nothing can happen but that God has decreed and willed it.[87] His view of human freedom is in the end the same as Luther's: the liberty of spontaneity. God's complete sovereignty excludes any genuine possibility of man's choosing in any circumstances other than as he does choose.

Thus, according to the Protestant Reformers, in virtue of God's prescience and providence, everything that occurs in the world does so necessarily. Human choice is voluntary and spontaneous, but the will is not free to choose other than as it does. Now to Molina, such a doctrine was quite simply heretical. He could not see how mere spontaneity of choice sufficed to make a human being a responsible moral agent nor how the Reformers' view could avoid making God the cause of man's sinful acts and, hence, the author of evil. Molina was therefore deeply exercised to formulate a strong doctrine of divine prescience, providence, and predestination that would be wholly compatible with genuine human freedom, and he believed that in *scientia media* he had found the key.

According to Molina's understanding of God's omniscience, the divine ideas present to God not only all *possibilia* but also *futuribilia* – that is, states of affairs that not only *could* obtain but in fact *would* obtain under the hypothesis that certain other states of affairs already obtained. By choosing to actualize a certain order of hypothetical states, God thus knows what further states will be actual as a consequence. Molina explains:

> It is not simply because things exist outside their causes in eternity that God knows future contingents with certainty; rather, before (in our way of conceiving it, but with a basis in reality) he creates anything at all, he comprehends in himself – because of the depth of his knowledge – all

[86] Martin Luther, "The Bondage of the Will," trans. P. S. Watson, in *Luther's Works*, vol. 33, *Career of the Reformer III*, ed. Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 37–38, 188–189.
[87] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* I.16.8.

> things which, as a result of all the secondary causes possible in virtue of his omnipotence, would contingently or simply freely come to be on the hypothesis that he should will to establish these or those orders of things with these or those circumstances; and by the very fact that through his free will he established in being that order of things and causes which he in fact established, he comprehended in his very self and in that very decree of his all the things which were in fact freely or contingently going to be or not going to be as a result of secondary causes – and he comprehended this not only prior to anything's existing in time, but even prior (in our way of conceiving it, with a basis in reality) to any created thing's existing in the duration of eternity.[88]

The notion of a sort of conceptual, atemporal priority within the knowledge of God was nothing new. Scotus had posited three moments in God's timeless knowledge of future contingents: (1) God's knowledge of contradictory pairs of all logically contingent propositions, (2) God's decision to actualize the state of affairs described in one disjunct of each contradictory pair, and (3) God's knowledge of all logically contingent propositions that as a result are in fact true.[89] Similarly Aquinas had posited three logically consecutive aspects of God's timeless act of knowledge: (1) *scientia simplicis intelligentiae*, by which God knows all the possibles; (2) *scientia approbationis*, by which God decides to create certain of the possibles; and (3) *scientia visionis,* by which God knows what exists at any time in the actual world.[90]

Molina, too, posits three logically consecutive moments in God's knowledge of the actual world. He holds that the relation of priority among them is conceptual *nostro modo intelligendi;* we are not to admit of any temporal priority of succession in God's knowledge. On the other hand, this relation of priority is not therefore a mere figment of the imagination but has a basis in reality (*cum fundamento in re*). What Molina had in mind is a relation of conditionship between the various aspects of God's knowledge; God can have a certain sort of knowledge only on the condition of his having a certain other type of knowledge. The latter sort is thus in a sense prior to the former.

Molina agrees with Thomas that between God's *scientia simplicis intelligentiae* and *scientia visionis,* a decision of the divine will interposes. Precisely in virtue of this act of divine will, Molina prefers to call God's

[88] Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the "Concordia")*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 4.49.8.
[89] John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I.39–39.23.
[90] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* I.66.4; *Summa theologiae* Ia.14.8.

knowledge prior to his decision "natural knowledge" and his knowledge subsequent to that decision "free knowledge." God's natural knowledge comprises not only all the possibilities taken as individual entities but also all possible complexes of such entities and their actions:

> Through this type of knowledge he knew all the things to which the divine power extended either immediately or by the mediation of secondary causes, including not only the natures of individuals and the necessary states of affairs composed of them, but also the contingent states of affairs – through this knowledge he knew, to be sure, not that the latter were or were not going to obtain determinately, but rather that they were able to obtain and able not to obtain, a feature which belongs to them necessarily and thus also falls under God's natural knowledge.[91]

God's natural knowledge thus affords him a knowledge of every contingent state of affairs that could hypothetically obtain: ". . . the divine ideas represent to God *naturally*, before any free determination of his will, every future contingent state of affairs *under that hypothesis and condition*."[92] A central feature of God's natural knowledge is that the content of this knowledge is essential to God; indeed, this is why such knowledge is natural. It does not depend on God's will, but necessarily belongs to God's omniscience.

On the other hand, God's free knowledge is the aspect of his omniscience that comprises his knowledge of this existent, contingent world. This knowledge is posterior to the free decision of God's will to create, to instantiate one of the possible orders known by his natural knowledge. In Molina's words:

> The second type is pure *free* knowledge, by which, after the free act of his will, God knew *absolutely* and *determinately, without any condition or hypothesis,* which ones from among all the contingent states of affairs were *in fact* going to obtain and, likewise, which ones were not going to obtain.[93]

Since this knowledge is posterior to the decision of God's will and since God's decision to create this world is free, it follows that the content of his free knowledge is not essential to God but is contingent on which world God in fact creates. Had God created different worlds or even no world at

[91] Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge* IV.52.9.
[92] Molina, IV.50.17.
[93] Molina, IV.52.9.

all, the content of his free knowledge would have been different.[94] So while it is essential to God to have free knowledge, the content of what he freely knows is contingent on which world he chooses to create.

Now between these two moments of divine knowledge is interposed the act of the divine will, which Aquinas denominated *scientia approbationis*. According to Molina, God's act of will reflects "an absolutely complete and unlimited deliberation"[95] and results in one contingent order being freely instantiated by God rather than some other. But for Molina the act of God's will to create a world is not itself a type of knowledge. Hence, he denies that God's knowledge is a cause of things, except insofar as God's natural knowledge serves as a sort of exemplary cause on which creatures are patterned and insofar as his hypothetical knowledge, discussed below, delimits which possible orders of things God is able to bring into existence. Since God's willing to create some world is not itself a type of knowledge, Thomas' three types of divine knowledge are reduced to two: natural knowledge and free knowledge.

Now Molina believes that there is in fact a third type of knowledge in God that stands between his natural and free knowledge; for want of a better name, Molina calls it simply middle knowledge. Middle knowledge is the aspect of divine omniscience that comprises God's knowledge, prior to any determination of the divine will, of which contingent events would occur under any hypothetical set of circumstances. Molina writes:

> the third type is *middle* knowledge, by which, in virtue of the most profound and inscrutable comprehension of each free will, he saw in his own essence what each such will would do with its innate freedom were it to be placed in this or that or, indeed, in infinitely many orders of things – even though it would really be able, if it so willed, to do the opposite. . . .[96]

Thus, whereas by his natural knowledge God knows that, say, Peter when placed under a certain set of circumstances *could* either deny Christ or not deny Christ, being free to do either under identical circumstances,[97] by his

[94] Molina notes that even in the case in which God decides not to create, he would have free knowledge, though it would be comprised of negative propositions; e.g., *Creatures do not exist*, *The Son will not become incarnate*, etc. (Molina, IV.53.4.3).
[95] Molina, IV.52.13.
[96] Molina, IV.52.9.
[97] Molina rejects any analysis of freedom in terms of spontaneity, for even animals, children, and the demented possess the latter. He holds that true libertarian freedom must entail the ability to do or refrain from an act or to do the opposite of an act under identical causal conditions. The liberty of indifference, he says, is a fact of experience, is theologically presupposed by the existence of sin, and is taught by the Scriptures and the Church Fathers.

middle knowledge God knows what Peter *would* do if placed under those circumstances.

According to Molina, middle knowledge cannot be reduced to either natural knowledge or free knowledge but shares features of each. It cannot be reduced to free knowledge because (1) it is prior to any free decree of God's will and (2) the content of divine middle knowledge does not lie within the scope of his power, so that he cannot control what he knows via such knowledge.

These two features of middle knowledge are extremely important. The first implies that God's knowledge of what contingent events would take place under any set of circumstances is a prerequisite for God's knowledge of what will in fact occur in the world. Both God's willing to create a world and his consequent knowledge of what will in fact be actual presuppose and depend on his knowing what would occur under any given set of circumstances. He did not, for example, first know what Peter would do in the actual circumstances that would exist and then on this basis know what Peter would have done had he been placed in some other set of circumstances. Rather the opposite is true: prior to God's decision to create any set of circumstances, he knew what Peter would do within any possible order of circumstances; then, given the decision of his will to bring about a certain set of circumstances, God knows what Peter would in fact do.

The second feature of middle knowledge follows from the first. Since middle knowledge is prior to any decision of the divine will, its content is independent of the divine will and, hence, outside the pale of God's omnipotence. Just as God's knowledge of logical truths is outside his control and is simply given, so, too, his knowledge of what would be the free decision of created wills under certain circumstances is simply given and outside his control. Of course, God may easily prevent a creature's free decision by not creating that creature at all or by altering the circumstances in such a way as to bring it about that the creature freely decides to do something else; but God cannot annul the fact that if a free creature *were* to be placed in a certain set of circumstances, he *would* choose to do a certain act. Thus, for example, God could prevent Peter's denial of Christ by not creating Peter at all while creating many of the same extra-Petrine circumstances or else by creating a different set of circumstances under which Peter would not have denied Christ. But God cannot control the fact that were he to bring about a specific set of circumstances, then Peter would in those circumstances freely deny Christ. Since the content of divine middle knowledge thus depends on what the creatures themselves would do, God cannot control what he knows by his middle knowledge.

On the other hand, neither can middle knowledge be reduced to natural knowledge, though Molina at first introduces it as a sort of natural knowledge.[98] For whereas the content of God's natural knowledge is essential to him, clearly the content of his middle knowledge is not, since creatures are free under certain sets of circumstances to refrain from doing what they would do. While it is essential to God's nature that he have middle knowledge, the content of that knowledge is contingent because creatures could act differently under identical circumstances. But if their decisions were to be different, then the content of God's middle knowledge would be different. As Molina explains, "If created free choice were going to do the opposite, as indeed it can, then God would have known that very thing through this same type of knowledge and not what he in fact knows. Therefore, it is no more natural for God to know through this sort of knowledge one part of a contradiction that depends on created free choice than it is for him to know the opposite part."[99]

Middle knowledge, then, may be said to be like natural knowledge in that it is prior to the decision of the divine will and outside God's power, but to be like free knowledge in that such knowledge depends on a decision of free will (in this case, however, creatures', not God's) that could be different and so is not essential to God.

As Molina's original explanation cited above indicates, it is God's middle knowledge that thus supplies the basis for God's foreknowledge of contingent events in the actual world. By knowing what every possible creature would do under any possible circumstances, God knows what will in fact take place in the world. Molina explains,

> All contingent states of affairs are. . . represented to God *naturally, before* any act or free determination of the divine will; and they are represented not only as being *possible* but also as being *future* – not *absolutely future,* but *future under the condition and on the hypothesis* that God should decide to create this or that order of things and causes with these or those circumstances. However, once the determination of the divine will is added. . . God knows all the contingent states of affairs with certainty as being future *simply* and *absolutely,* and now *without any hypothesis or condition*.[100]

For Molina an order of things and causes constitutes a possible world that God instantiates progressively in time, while sets of circumstances are

[98] Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge* IV.49.13.
[99] Molina, IV.52.10.
[100] Molina, IV.50.15.

less than maximal states of affairs within the world. By knowing what free creatures would do under any possible circumstances, God is, so to speak, able to construct a possible world containing (1) circumstances caused directly by God, (2) decisions wrought by the free creatures whom God wills to create, and (3) further circumstances brought about by the decisions of such creatures. By means of his middle knowledge, God is able to construct a possible world that is both within his power to actualize and is consonant with his will. By taking into account the free decisions of creatures in his planning, God in willing to actualize a certain world does not violate the freedom of creatures in that world, though he knows with certainty what they will do:

> . . . the explanation for God's knowing with certainty which part of any contradiction among those contingent states of affairs dependent on free created choice is going to obtain is not a determination of the divine will by which God turns and determines created free choice to one or the other part, but is instead a free determination by which God decides to create free choice in this or that order of things and circumstances. Nor do we believe that this determination is *by itself* a *sufficient* explanation for God's knowing with certainty which part of each contradiction among those states of affairs is going to obtain; rather the sufficient explanation is the determination of the divine will *along with* God's comprehension in his essence of each created free will through his natural [i.e., middle] knowledge, a comprehension by means of which he knows with certainty, before the determination of his will, what such and such a free will would do in its freedom on the hypothesis and condition that God should create it and situate it in this particular order of things – even though it could, if it so willed, do the opposite, and even though if it were going to do the opposite, as it is able to, then God would have known *this* in his essence through that very same knowledge and comprehension, and *not* what he *in fact* knows is going to be done by that free will.[101]

By positing middle knowledge in God, Molina is thus able to offer an innovative and provocative account of how it is that God foreknows future contingents.

Now it might be asked how it is that knowing his own essence alone God is able to have middle knowledge concerning what free creatures would

[101] Molina, IV.50.15.

do in any situation.[102] Molina and his compatriot and fellow Jesuit, Francisco Suárez, differed in their responses to this question. Molina's answer is alluded to in the words of the citation above: "because of the depth of his knowledge." According to Molina, God not only knows in his own essence all possible creatures, but his intellect infinitely surpasses the capabilities of finite free wills so that he understands them so thoroughly that he knows not only what they *could* choose under any set of circumstances, but what they *would* choose.[103] In another place Molina speaks of "his immense and altogether unlimited *knowledge,* by which he comprehends in the deepest and most eminent way whatever falls under his omnipotence, *to penetrate created free choice* in such a way as to discern and intuit with certainty which part it is going to turn itself to by its own innate freedom.[104] Because his intellect is infinite, whereas a free creature is finite, God's insight into the will of a free creature is of such a surpassing quality that God knows exactly what the free creature would do were God to place him in a certain set of circumstances. Molina calls this God's supercomprehension.

Suárez, on the other hand, argues that God must have knowledge of *futura conditionata* because the conditional propositions concerning such events are bivalent.[105] To the extent that such propositions are true, they are knowable; for all truth is as such knowable, since truth as truth is the proper object of the intellect and of knowledge. Since God is all-knowing, he must therefore know such conditional propositions. Suárez compares God's omniscience to his omnipotence: just as his power extends to all things possible so God's knowledge extends to all things knowable. The whole dispute therefore devolves to the question of whether such conditional propositions have determinate truth and falsity. Since, in Suárez's view, such propositions are true or false, God knows essentially and immediately all such true propositions.

In summary, then, divine omniscience, though eternal and complete, can be conceptually differentiated into three types of knowledge, which

[102] Kvanvig has complained that "Molinists have not explained how God is capable, prior to creation, of having middle knowledge; they have merely posited that he does" (Jonathan L. Kvanvig, review of *Molinism: The Contemporary Debate*, ed. Ken Perszyk, *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, November 30, 2012, https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/molinism-the-contemporary-debate). I see no problem with thus postulating such a model, even if one lacks an explanation of how God has middle knowledge, any more than postulating that God is omnipotent even if one lacks an explanation of how he is so. In any case, Molina and Suárez do offer explanations. We can think of Molina's doctrine of supercomprehension in terms of individual essences' having contingent counterfactual properties discerned by God and Suárez's explanation in terms of a conceptualist model of innate knowledge.

[103] Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge* IV.49.11.

[104] Molina, IV.50.15.

[105] Francisco Suárez, *De scientia Dei futurorum contingentium* 2.5; Francisco Suárez, *Tractatus de gratia Dei* II.8.1.

are ordered according to a sort of conditional priority. Most fundamental is God's unconditional natural knowledge, which includes his knowledge of all logically possible states of affairs and possible maximal orders. Posterior to this is God's middle knowledge, which serves to delimit the possible states of affairs to those that would become actual through the free decisions of creatures, should God choose to actualize certain sets of circumstances that include them, and to those maximal orders that could obtain, should God freely decide to act himself in one way or other. God then deliberates which order he will instantiate, including what decisions he will take and what decisions he would take under other circumstances, and freely chooses to create a certain world order. Finally, then, on the basis of his decision to create some world order, God knows every detail about that order, not only the circumstances he will directly bring about and the decisions he will make, but also the free decisions that creatures will make and the contingent circumstances that will result as a consequence of those decisions.

6.4.2 Arguments for Divine Middle Knowledge

Why think that God has middle knowledge? Basically three lines of argument present themselves: biblical, philosophical, and theological.

6.4.2.1 Biblical Arguments

Biblically speaking, as we have seen in our survey of biblical data relevant to divine omniscience, it is not difficult to show that God possesses hypothetical knowledge involving subjunctive conditionals about human free choices. I think it is plain that the God of the Bible exhibits such counterfactual knowledge. Given God's infallibility, it will not do to construe these biblical examples as mere hunches on God's part. If God believes, for example, that Saul would besiege Keilah if David were to remain in the city, then that counterfactual statement is known by God to be true, since it is logically impossible for God to subscribe to false beliefs.

Unfortunately, this does not settle the matter of whether God has middle knowledge. For the scriptural passages show only that God possesses counterfactual knowledge, and until modern times that has not been a matter of dispute among Christian theologians. What theologians did dispute, however, was at what point in the logical order of things God has such counterfactual knowledge. Theologians of the Dominican order held that God's counterfactual knowledge is logically *posterior* to his decree to create a certain world. They maintained that in decreeing that a particular world exist, God also decreed which counterfactual statements are true.

Logically prior to the divine decree, there are no counterfactual truths to be known. All God knows at that logically prior moment are the necessary truths, including all the various possibilities. By contrast theologians of the Jesuit order, inspired by Molina, maintained that God's counterfactual knowledge is logically *prior* to his creative decree. Molinists charged that the Dominicans had, in effect, obliterated human freedom by making counterfactual truths a consequence of God's decree. For it is God who determines what a person will do in whatever circumstances he finds himself. By contrast, the Molinists, by placing God's counterfactual knowledge prior to the divine decree, made room for human freedom by exempting counterfactual truths from God's decree.

On the Dominican view, there is one logical moment prior to the divine creative decree, at which God knows the range of possible worlds which he might create, and then he chooses one of these to be actual. On the Molinist view, there are two logical moments prior to the divine decree: first, the moment at which he has natural knowledge of the range of possible worlds and second, the moment at which he has knowledge of the proper subset of possible worlds which, given the counterfactuals true at that moment, are feasible for him to create. The counterfactuals which are true at that moment thus serve to delimit the range of possible worlds to worlds feasible for God.

The dispute between Molinists and their opponents thus concerned *when* in the logical order of things God's counterfactual knowledge comes: is it before or after the divine decree? Since Scripture does not reflect upon this question, no amount of proof-texting concerning God's counterfactual knowledge can go to prove that such knowledge is possessed logically prior to God's creative decree. This is a matter for theologico-philosophical reflection, not biblical exegesis. Thus, while it is clearly unbiblical to deny that God has simple foreknowledge and counterfactual knowledge, those who deny middle knowledge cannot be accused of being unbiblical.

6.4.2.2 Philosophical Argument

Fortunately, we have good philosophical grounds for thinking that a doctrine of middle knowledge is correct. For as an omniscient being, God must know all truths. Since there are counterfactual truths, God must know these. Now such truths are known by God either explanatorily prior to his decree to create the world or only posterior to his creative decree. But they cannot be known only posterior to his creative decree, since in that case it is God who decrees what choices agents shall make in whatever circumstances they find themselves, and human freedom

is annihilated. Therefore, God must know counterfactuals of creaturely freedom logically prior to his creative decree, which is to say that God has middle knowledge.

We may formulate this argument as follows:

42. If there are true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, then God knows these truths.

43. There are true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom.

44. If God knows true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, God knows them either logically prior to the divine creative decree or only logically posterior to the divine creative decree.

45. Counterfactuals of creaturely freedom cannot be known only logically posterior to the divine creative decree.

From (42) and (43) it follows logically that

46. Therefore, God knows true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom.

From (44) and (45), it follows that

47. Therefore, God knows true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom either logically prior to the divine creative decree or only logically posterior to the divine creative decree.

And from (43) and (47) it follows that

48. Therefore, God knows true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom logically prior to the divine creative decree.

–which is the essence of the doctrine of divine middle knowledge.

Let us say a word in defense of each of the argument's four premises.

The truth of (42) is required by the standard definition of omniscience:

O_2. *S* is omniscient $=_{def}$ For all *p*, if *p*, *S* knows that *p* and does not believe that ~*p*.

(O_2) entails that if there are counterfactual truths, then an omniscient being must know them. We have already seen the failure of revisionists to craft acceptable alternatives to (O_2) which would exempt an omniscient being from knowing all truths, *modulo* hierarchical concerns. Therefore, premise (42) is securely established.

Premise (43) asserts that there are true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. This premise does not require us to believe that all counterfactuals about creatures' free acts are either true or false. But it does seem plausible that counterfactuals of the following form are either true or false (letting *S* be any person, *A* some action, and *C* any set of circumstances including the whole history of the world up until the point of decision):

CCF. If *S* were in *C, S* would freely do *A*.

It is counterfactuals of this form which we dignify with the title "counterfactuals of creaturely freedom."[106]

We have every reason to think that there are true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. In the first place, it is plausible that counterfactuals of the form (CCF) are true or false. For since the circumstances mentioned in the antecedent in which *S* finds himself are fully specified, any ambiguity which might cause us to doubt that the counterfactual has a truth value is removed.[107] And it is plausible that in many cases *S* would freely do *A* in *C*, just as the counterfactual states. Second, we ourselves often know the truth of counterfactuals about how people would act or react under particular circumstances. While we may not know such truths with certainty, we constantly make decisions and act on the basis of which counterfactuals we think are probably true. A little reflection reveals how pervasive and indispensable such counterfactual truths are to rational conduct and planning. We sometimes base our very lives upon their truth or falsity. Third, as pointed out above, Scripture itself gives examples of such true counterfactuals (think about Paul's statement in I Cor 2.8). Are we to think that these biblical statements are truth-value gaps in Scripture or are uniformly false? The doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration precludes this.

Premise (44) of the argument for middle knowledge states logically exhaustive alternatives for an omniscient deity and so must be true: counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are known by God either prior to his decree or only after his decree.

Finally, premise (45) must be true because if counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are known only after the divine decree, then it is God who determined what every creature would do in every circumstance. Augustinian-Calvinist thinkers bear witness to the truth of this

[106] The nomenclature is Thomas Flint's and has become standard.

[107] A standard example of counterfactuals failing to have a determinate truth value due to a lack of a specification of the antecedent is "If Verdi and Bizet were compatriots, they would both be French" and "If Verdi and Bizet were compatriots, they would both be Italian."

premise in their affirmation of compatibilist theories of creaturely freedom (according to which all our acts, though voluntary, are causally determined). They thereby testify that God's all-determining decree precludes libertarian freedom, which is the sort of freedom with which we are here concerned. Thus, if God knows counterfactual truths about us only posterior to his decree, then there really are no counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. If there are such counterfactuals, they must be true logically prior to the divine decree.

Given the truth of the premises, the conclusion follows that prior to his creative decree God knows all true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, which is to say that he has middle knowledge.

6.4.2.3 Theological Arguments

Perhaps the strongest arguments for the Molinist perspective are theological. Once one grasps the concept of middle knowledge, one will find it astonishing in its subtlety and power. Indeed, I should venture to say that it is one of the most fruitful theological concepts ever conceived. We have already seen how it may be deployed to articulate a credible theory of plenary, verbal, confluent biblical inspiration.[108] Recent studies have applied it to the issues of Christian particularism,[109] perseverance of the saints,[110] papal infallibility;[111] Christology,[112] and evolutionary theory.[113] An article begs to be written on a Molinist perspective of quantum indeterminacy and divine sovereignty.

As Molina showed, middle knowledge provides an illuminating account of divine foreknowledge and providence. We have already seen how middle knowledge can help us to understand the basis of divine foreknowledge of future contingents. Divine foreknowledge is based on (i) God's middle knowledge of what every creature would freely do under any circumstances and (ii) his knowledge of the divine decree to create certain

[108] See this *Systematic Philosophical Theology,* vol. I, *De Scriptura sacra*, 134–141.
[109] William Lane Craig, "'No Other Name': A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation through Christ," *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (1989): 172–188.
[110] William Lane Craig, "'Lest Anyone Should Fall': A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Perseverance and Apostolic Warnings," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 29 (1991): 65–74.
[111] Thomas Flint, "Middle Knowledge and the Doctrine of Infallibility," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 373–393.
[112] Thomas P. Flint, "'A Death He Freely Accepted': Molinist Reflections on the Incarnation," *Faith and Philosophy* 18 (2001): 3–20.
[113] Del Ratzsch, "Design, Chance, and Theistic Evolution," in *Mere Creation: Science, Faith and Intelligent Design*, ed. William Dembski (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 289–312.

sets of circumstances and to place certain creatures in them. Given middle knowledge and the divine decree, foreknowledge follows automatically as a result.[114]

The Molinist account of divine providence is even more stunning than its account of divine foreknowledge. Consider the following biblical passages:

> 'This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.' (Acts 2.23)
>
> 'For truly in this city there were gathered together against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place.' (Acts 4.27–28)

Here we have a staggering assertion of divine sovereignty over the affairs of men. The conspiracy to crucify Jesus, involving not only the Romans and the Jews in Jerusalem at that time, but more particularly Pilate and Herod, who tried Jesus, is said to have happened by God's plan based on his foreknowledge and foreordination. How are we to understand so far-reaching a providence as this?

We shall have much more to say about this when we come to the locus *De creatione* and the doctrine of divine providence.[115] But for now, if we take the biblical word "foreknowledge" to encompass middle knowledge, then we can make perfect sense of the above passages. For via his middle knowledge, God knew exactly which persons, if members of the Sanhedrin, would freely vote for Jesus' condemnation; which persons, if in Jerusalem, would freely demand Christ's death, favoring the release of Barabbas; what Herod, if King, would freely do in reaction to Jesus and to Pilate's plea to judge him; and what Pilate himself, if

[114] This fact belies the grossly distorted presentation of divine middle knowledge by Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:198–203. Bavinck thinks that middle knowledge is God's knowledge of what he will do in case any of the possibilities known to him via his natural knowledge are or are not actualized by humans. God foreknows future contingent events as possible but learns from the world whether or not they are actually realized. Ironically, when Bavinck asks, "What are we to think of a God who forever awaits all those decisions and keeps in readiness a store of all possible plans for all possibilities?" (201), he describes, not Molinism, but revisionist views of divine "openness"! Bavinck's complaint, "God does not derive his knowledge of free actions of human beings from his own being, his own decrees, but from the world of creatures" (201) is without merit. It is telling that Bavinck's discussion includes no references to either Molina or Suárez. Still, it is clear that Bavinck as a Reformed thinker would object to Molina's scheme even if he understood it, for he would reject the independence of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom from God's decree. "Of course, freedom of the will thus conceived cannot be harmonized with the decree of God; it essentially consists in independence from the decree of God" (200). He believes—mistakenly, as we shall see—that those who affirm libertarian human freedom "come into conflict" with divine omnipotence (245).

[115] See this *Systematic Philosophical Theology,* vol. III, *De creatione*, pt. II.1, *Providentia ordinaria*.

holding the prefecture of Palestine in A.D. 30, would freely do under the pressure of the Jewish leaders and the crowd. Knowing all the possible circumstances, persons, and permutations of these, God decreed to create just those circumstances and just those people who would freely do what God willed to happen. Thus, the whole scenario, as Luke insists, unfolded according to *God's plan*. When one reflects that the existence of the various circumstances and persons involved was itself the result of myriads of prior free choices on the part of these and other agents, and these in turn of yet other prior contingencies, and so on, then we see that only an omniscient mind could providentially direct a world of free creatures toward his sovereignly established ends. In fact, Paul reflects that "None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (I Cor 2.8). Once one grasps it, the doctrine of divine middle knowledge thus issues in adoration and praise of God for so breathtaking a sovereignty.

We thus have very powerful philosophical and theological reasons to embrace a doctrine of divine middle knowledge.

6.4.3 Objections to Middle Knowledge

The doctrine of middle knowledge always has been and remains a matter of considerable controversy among philosophical theologians. I have elsewhere responded at some length to the traditional Thomist objections to middle knowledge, namely, that (1) middle knowledge is impossible because it lacks any object; (2) middle knowledge posits passivity in God; and (3) middle knowledge is incompatible with divine freedom.[116] I shall not repeat here all that I have said there but shall focus on two objections to divine middle knowledge in the contemporary literature, first, that there are no true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, and second, that counterfactuals of creaturely freedom cannot be true prior to the divine decree. Recent objections to a Molinist theory of providence will be discussed at the appropriate place in the locus *De creatione*.

6.4.3.1 Are There True Counterfactuals of Creaturely Freedom?

We have already addressed this question positively in defending premise

43. There are true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom.

[116] Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, 246–278.

of our philosophical argument in support of divine middle knowledge. Here we want to consider negatively what reason might be given for thinking that there are no true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. Thomas Flint has observed that the so-called "grounding objection" is in the minds of many philosophers "the principal obstacle" to endorsing the Molinist doctrine of divine middle knowledge.[117] Ironically, this influential objection has scarcely ever been articulated or defended in any depth by its advocates. For behind the grounding objection lies a theory about the relationship of truth and reality which needs to be articulated, defended, and then applied to counterfactuals of freedom if the grounding objection is to carry any probative force. The grounding objection, if it is to be successful, must, as a rebutting defeater, have more warrant than that enjoyed by the premise that there are true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom.

What is the grounding objection? It is the claim that there are no true counterfactuals concerning what creatures would freely do under certain specified circumstances–the propositions expressed by such counterfactual sentences are said either to have no truth value or to be uniformly false–, since there is nothing to make these counterfactuals true. Because they are contrary-to-fact conditionals and are supposed to be true logically prior to God's creative decree, there is no ground of the truth of such counterfactual propositions. Thus, they cannot be known by God.

So what can be said on behalf of the grounding objection? I have said that the grounding objection seems to assume a particular theory about the relationship of truth and reality. The theory presupposed by the grounding objection appears to be a certain construal or version of a view of truth as correspondence which has come to be known as the theory of truthmakers, a theory which we have already encountered in our discussion of divine simplicity.[118] We saw that historically the standard view has identified truthmakers with such abstract realities as facts or states of affairs–more often than not, the fact stated as a sentence's truth condition, as disclosed by the disquotation principle.

Now we immediately see the potentially misleading connotations of the term "truthmaker" for such entities. For *making* sounds like a causal relation between a truth-bearer and some concrete object, but truthmaker theorists are quite clear that the relation is by no means causal. An entity *a* makes

[117] Flint, *Divine Providence*, 123.
[118] *Supra*, 153–156.

a proposition *p* true if and only if that *a* exists entails that *p*.[119] That truth-makers are usually conceived to be such abstract entities as facts or states of affairs underlines the point that a causal relation is not at issue here.

That the relation between a truthmaker and a truth-bearer is not causal is especially evident if we require truthmakers for negative existential statements like "Baal does not exist." According to Kevin Mulligan, Peter Simons, and Barry Smith, "Not only Wittgenstein, but indeed almost all other philosophers who have investigated the relation of making true, have felt compelled in the face of the problems raised by negative propositions to adopt an ontology of truth makers as special, non-objectual entities having a complexity which is essentially logical."[120] Obviously a fact like Baal's non-existence, which is sufficient for the truth that Baal does not exist, is not a cause of anything.

A proper understanding of truthmakers, then, invalidates at once the crude construal of the grounding objection expressed in Robert Adams' statement of the problem and again in Alfred Freddoso's and Thomas Flint's respective formulations of the grounding objection:

> Counterfactuals of freedom . . . are supposed to be contingent truths that are not caused to be true by God. Who or what does cause them to be true?[121]

> . . . metaphysically contingent propositions . . . require *causal* grounding in order to be true. That is, they must be *caused to be true* by some agent or agents, since it is not of their nature to be true.[122]

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[119] The theist must regard this characterization as untenable, however, since (unless one denies with William Alston that God has beliefs) God's beliefs then count as truthmakers for the propositions he believes. For God's beliefs are usually taken to be entities in a sense countenanced by truthmaker theory, often being characterized as "hard" or "soft" facts about the past. But taking God's beliefs as truthmakers seems to stand things on their head, since intuitively something is not true because God believes it, but God believes it because it is true. Moreover, if God's beliefs are explanatorily prior to the truth of propositions about human actions, then creaturely freedom would seem to be eliminated, just as divine freedom would be eliminated if counterfactuals of divine freedom were true explanatorily prior to God's decree. Bigelow states the truthmaker principle more acceptably: "What Truthmaker says is: 'For each truth *A* there must be something *a* such that, *necessarily, if a exists then A is true*' " (John Bigelow, *The Reality of Numbers: A Physicalist's Philosophy of Mathematics* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988], 127). Unfortunately this principle is false because it entails truthmaker maximalism (see below); but at least it captures the idea that truthmaking is essentially a logical relation. Perhaps the truthmaker theorist should say that for any truth-bearer *A* which has a truthmaker *a*, *A* is true in virtue of *a* (or *a* makes *A* true) $=_{\text{def.}}$ *a*'s existence necessitates that *A* has the value *true*.

[120] Kevin Mulligan, Peter Simons, and Barry Smith, "Truth-Makers," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 44, no. 3 (1984): 315.

[121] Robert Adams, "Plantinga on the Problem of Evil," in *Alvin Plantinga*, ed. James Tomberlin and Peter van Inwagen (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1985), 232. Cf. William Hasker's demand, "Who or what is it (if anything) that *brings it about* that these propositions are true?" (William Hasker, "A Refutation of Middle Knowledge," *Noûs* 20 [1986]: 547).

[122] Alfred J. Freddoso, "Introduction," in *On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the "Concordia")*, by Luis de Molina, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 70.

> But if such conditionals are contingent, they might not have been true. Who, then, *makes* them true? Or, to phrase this question more carefully: Who or what actually *causes* the ones that are true to be true and the ones that are false to be false?
>
> . . . neither God nor his free creatures cause counterfactuals of creaturely freedom to be true. . . . The conclusion that seems forced upon us, then, is that nobody actually causes the counterfactuals in question to be true.[123]

The truthmaker theorist would take it as understood that nobody actually causes counterfactuals or any other sort of proposition to be true.[124] The demand for a cause of a proposition's being true is inept, unless the anti-Molinist is presupposing some very special causal theory of truthmakers, in which case he owes us an articulation of that theory and a defense, not merely of its adequacy, but of its superiority to customary truthmaker theories.

It might be said that the demand for a cause of the truth of true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom is a mere rhetorical flourish on the part of the anti-Molinist. But even if we give him the benefit of the doubt in this regard, the fact remains that the anti-Molinist still seems to be presupposing that in order to be true, counterfactuals of freedom must have truthmakers that either are or imply the existence of concrete objects. Not only does he owe us some explanation and justification for restricting truthmakers in this way, but such an assumption seems quite implausible. For we can think of other types of true propositions whose truthmakers neither are nor imply the existence of concrete objects. Consider, for example, the following statements:

49. No physical objects exist.
50. Dinosaurs are extinct today.
51. All ravens are black.
52. Torturing a child is wrong.
53. Napoleon lost the Battle of Waterloo.

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[123] Flint, *Divine Providence,* 123, 125. I should add that Freddoso and Flint are simply accurately reporting the objection as formulated by the detractors of middle knowledge.

[124] "Making to be the case is of course not *causal*" (D. M. Armstrong, *A World of States of Affairs,* Cambridge Studies in Philosophy [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 115); "The notion 'makes it true that' has nothing to do with causality" (Peter Simons, "Logical Atomism and Its Ontological Refinement: A Defense," in *Language, Truth, and Ontology*, ed. Kevin Mulligan [Dordrecht: Springer, 1992], 159); "A truthmaker should 'make' something true, not in a causal sense, but rather, in what is presumably a logical sense. . . . the 'making' in 'making true' is essentially logical entailment" (Bigelow, *Reality of Numbers*, 125).

54. The U.S. President in 2070 will be a woman.

55. If a rigid rod were placed in uniform motion through the aether, it would suffer a FitzGerald-Lorentz contraction.

Statement (49) could be true and statement (50) is true, yet they preclude truthmakers which are or imply the existence of the relevant concrete objects (such as dinosaurs). If such statements have truthmakers they would seem to be such things as the state of affairs of *there being no universe* or of *dinosaurs' no longer existing*. Some truthmaker theorists have maintained that such negative existential statements are true without having any truthmakers. For example, Mulligan, Simons, and Smith assert, "it seems more adequate to regard sentences of the given kind as true not in virtue of any truth maker of their own, but simply in virtue of the fact that the corresponding positive sentences have no truth maker."[125] But this assertion is self-contradictory. For a truthmaker is precisely that entity in virtue of which a sentence and/or proposition is true, and on their account a true, negative existential statement like "Baal does not exist" is true *in virtue of the fact* that the corresponding positive statement "Baal exists" lacks a truthmaker. Thus, this negative existential statement does have a truthmaker after all, namely, the fact that *"Baal exists" has no truthmaker*. A similar problem seems to attend D. M. Armstrong's attempt to eliminate truthmakers for negative existential statements on the basis of the second-order state of affairs of there being all the first-order states of affairs there are.[126] Presumably the idea is that if the state of affairs described by the corresponding positive existential statement is not included in the second-order state of affairs cataloging all the first order states of affairs, then the negative statement is true without having a truthmaker. But, we may ask, is it not then the case that the negative statement is true in virtue of the fact that the relevant positive state of affairs is not included in the totality of states of affairs or in virtue of existence of the state of affairs of the positive state's not being so included?

A further difficulty for such accounts is that the want of a truthmaker for an affirmative existential statement or the absence of a positive state of affairs from a second-order state of affairs does not always seem to suffice for the truth of the relevant negative statements. Take (50), for example. The want of a truthmaker for "Dinosaurs are alive today" or the absence of the relevant state of affairs from the totality of states does not seem to make it true that dinosaurs are extinct today. The same goes for "Dinosaurs

[125] Mulligan, Simons, and Smith, "Truth-Makers," 315.
[126] Armstrong, *States of Affairs,* 27, 135.

are still alive today," for the negation of that sort of statement is notoriously ambiguous. The difficulty is that (50) seems to imply the positive assertion that dinosaurs were once alive and so needs more than just the lack of a truthmaker in order to be true. It seems to require as its truthmaker the fact that dinosaurs were once alive and now are not alive. In any case, even if negative existential statements are not made true in virtue of some fact or state of affairs, the anti-Molinist can hardly be encouraged by the prospect that we have here an exception to notion that true statements require truthmakers. If there can be true statements without any truthmakers of those statements, how do we know that counterfactual statements cannot be true without truthmakers?

Statement (51) is a universally quantified statement which as such does not carry existential implications. Therefore, it cannot be true just in virtue of existing ravens' being black, much less in virtue of the black ravens there are, for it would be true even if there were no ravens at all. Statement (52) is an ethical judgement which implies neither that children exist nor that any are ever actually tortured. It is hard to see how ethical and aesthetic judgements can be made true apart from ethical and aesthetic facts' being among their truthmakers.

Statements (53) and (54) are tensed statements about persons who no longer or do not yet exist (at least on a tensed theory of time) and so cannot have such persons among their truthmakers. Truthmaker theorists need to grapple seriously with problems posed by tense and temporal becoming. Barry Smith offers two proposals: either we "need to introduce an explicit temporal dimension into our account of truthmaking, along the lines of: this liquid makes it true *at t* that it is odourless," or alternatively, we "might embrace a strictly presentist reading of '*x* makes it true that *p*'. Some true contingent past and future tense judgments will then be such that, while their truthmakers do not exist, they did or will exist."[127] These brief suggestions are merely programmatic; but the first seems to contemplate tenselessly existing truthmakers of tensed sentences along the lines of a tenseless theory of time,[128] while the second appears to involve tensed truthmakers of tensed sentences such as might be postulated in a tensed theory of time.[129] Smith's suggestion for this latter view is to assert that past- and future-tense statements literally have (present-tense) no truthmakers, although they either did or will. This suggestion is problematic, however,

[127] Barry Smith, "Truthmaker Realism," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1999): 274–291.
[128] See, for example, D. H. Mellor, *Real Time II* (London: Routledge, 1998), 34.
[129] Compare the tensed truth-conditions given by Graham Priest, "Tense and Truth Conditions," *Analysis* 46, no. 4 (1986): 162–166; see further D. H. Mellor, "Tense's Tenseless Truth Conditions," *Analysis* 46, no. 4 (1986): 167–172; Graham Priest, "Tense, *Tense*, and TENSE," *Analysis* 47, no. 4 (1987): 184–187.

because when the truthmaker of, say, a future-tense sentence like "Trump will be inaugurated as our forty-fifth President" becomes present, then that statement, far from being true, is false, and the corresponding present-tense statement, "Trump is being inaugurated as our forty-fifth President" is or becomes true. Thus, we should more plausibly say either that true past- and future-tense statements have no truthmakers at all, though their present-tense counterparts did or will have or that their truthmakers are the present-tense statements' having been or going to be true, or more simply the tensed facts stated as their tensed truth conditions, as disclosed by the disquotation principle. None of this is encouraging to the anti-Molinist, for again we find an important class of statements which either are true without having truthmakers or else have as their truthmakers abstractions like facts or states of affairs.

Finally, statement (55) is a true counterfactual about the aether of nineteenth century mechanics, which does not exist. One cannot say that the aether's properties serve as the truthmaker of (55), for the aether, being non-existent, has no properties. Of course, if the aether did exist, the aether would have properties, so perhaps one could say that what makes (55) true is the fact that in the most similar possible worlds in which the antecedent is realized, the indicative version of the consequent has a truthmaker–but this would be of no comfort to anti-Molinists who presuppose that truthmakers must be or imply the existence of concrete objects.

These illustrations and the controversies they engender among truthmaker theorists underscore just how untenable a naïve conception of truthmakers as concrete objects is. The idea that the truthmakers of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom must be literal people or any sort of concrete object is extraordinary.

Now, as I say, it is a matter of considerable debate whether true propositions do have truthmakers at all. Truthmaker theory is, after all, a minority position, associated in analytic philosophy with thinkers in the tradition of Logical Atomism. Simons admits that since Tarski's development of truth-theory without truthmakers, it has been widely held that there is "no need" for truthmakers, such as Russell and Wittgenstein advocated.[130] Greg Restall has argued that given the customary axioms of truthmaker theory, it follows that every true proposition is made true by every truthmaker there is, so that, for example, *Grass is green* is made true by snow's being white. In a monumental understatement, Restall muses, "This is clearly not accept-

[130] Simons, "Logical Atomism," 158. Bigelow is embarrassed by the "linguistic magic" that guides truthmaker theory – "inferring the *existence* of certain things from the *truth* of certain claims: a way of calling things into existence by linguistic magic–*defining* things into existence" (Bigelow, *Reality of Numbers,* 7).

able for any philosophically discriminating account of truthmakers."[131] Perhaps these difficulties in truthmaker theory can be ironed out;[132] but the point remains that the doctrine is controversial and cannot just be assumed to be true.

In any case many truthmaker theorists themselves reject the doctrine of *truthmaker maximalism*,[133] the doctrine that every true statement has a truthmaker. I have yet to encounter an argument for the conclusion that counterfactuals of creaturely freedom cannot be among those types of truths lacking a truthmaker. Indeed, when one reflects on the fact that such statements are *counter*factual in nature, then such statements might seem to be prime candidates for belonging to that diverse class of statements which are true without having any truthmakers. The analogy with past- and future-tense statements is suggestive. Freddoso has argued that just as future-tense statements or propositions are grounded in the fact that a relevant present-tense proposition will have grounds of its truth, so a counterfactual of creaturely freedom is grounded in the fact that a relevant indicative proposition would have grounds of its truth. He explains,

> A realist about the absolute future will claim that there are *now* adequate metaphysical grounds for the truth of a future-tense proposition *Fp* just in case there *will* be at some future time adequate metaphysical grounds for the truth of its present-tense counterpart *p* . . . .
>
> But if this is so, then it seems reasonable to claim that there are now adequate metaphysical grounds for the truth of a conditional future contingent F^t *(p) on H* just in case there would be adequate metaphysical grounds at *t* for the truth of the present-tense proposition *p* on the condition that *H* should obtain at *t*.[134]

On Freddoso's account, contingent propositions of the form *Fp* or F^t *(p) on H* do have truthmakers, namely the fact or state of affairs that *p will have a truth-maker* or *p would have a truth-maker under the relevant condition* respectively.

In his analysis of Freddoso's view, Timothy O'Connor maintains that it would be more accurate simply to say that future contingent propositions have no grounds of their truth, but that they are true just in case

[131] Greg Restall, "Truthmakers, Entailment, and Necessity," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74, no. 2 (1996): 334.
[132] Restall proposes to solve the problem by an account of truthmakers in which he leaves his truthmakers undefined. The abstractness of the account only reinforces how ham-fisted is the handling of truthmakers by grounding objectors to Molinism.
[133] This is Barry Smith's term.
[134] Freddoso, "Introduction," 72.

their relevant present-tense counterparts will have grounds of their truth.[135] That is to say, propositions of the form *Fp* have *truth-conditions* which may be satisfied even though they lack *truthmakers*. This revision of Freddoso's view is along the lines of Barry Smith's second suggestion above for dealing with future-tense statements. Analogously, O'Connor proposes, we should reinterpret Freddoso's truthmakers for counterfactuals of creaturely freedom as giving truth-conditions for propositions of the form F^t *(p) on H*, while maintaining that such propositions do not have truthmakers. Although O'Connor, as an anti-Molinist, is none too happy about this analogy between future contingent propositions and counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, he grudgingly acknowledges its coherence and chooses to attack Molinism elsewhere.[136] But the point remains that it is far from obvious that counterfactuals of creaturely freedom have to have truthmakers in order to be true. Anti-Molinists have yet to show that counterfactuals

[135] Timothy O'Connor, "The Impossibility of Middle Knowledge," *Philosophical Studies* 66, no. 2 (1992): 155–56. Thus, O'Connor provides a semantics more consistent with a tensed theory of time than does David Paul Hunt, "Middle Knowledge: The 'Foreknowledge Defense'," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 28 (1990): 7, who says that future-tense statements "*are* true in virtue of corresponding to an actual state of affairs, albeit one that lies in the future."

[136] O'Connor, "Impossibility," 158–59. O'Connor retreats from denying the *truth* of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom to denying their *knowability*. His denial is based on the assumption that "God's infallible knowledge of a genuinely contingent proposition *p* involves or just consists of an immediate acquaintance with the grounds for *p*" (158). This is an astonishing claim. It entails that God is ignorant of all true contingent propositions which lack truthmakers. Why think that the way in which God knows true propositions is by knowing what are their truthmakers? O'Connor answers, "One cannot, after all, discern the truth of a contingent proposition by having a specially penetrating insight into the nature of the proposition itself" (159). If O'Connor is correct in this assertion, then God will be ignorant not only of all contingent truths which lack truthmakers, but he will also be ignorant of all non-analytic necessary truths as well, since those also lack truthmakers, according to standard truthmaker theory. O'Connor's position is thus incompatible with classical theism. In any case, his justification for restricting God's knowledge to propositions which have truthmakers is wholly implausible. For given the ontology of truth presupposed by the theory of truthmakers, there really are entities, like propositions, which serve as truth-bearers. These are real property-bearing entities, and one of the properties they bear is truth (or falsity). This is a genuine property inhering in some, but not all, of these entities. Therefore, God most certainly can by an immediate inspection of the proposition itself discern whether it bears the property of truth or not.

Indeed, thinkers like O'Connor and Hasker, who admit the bivalence of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom or future contingent propositions (see Flint, *Divine Providence,* 130) but deny God's knowledge of the same, find themselves in an ultimately incoherent position. For what must they say concerning a present-tense proposition *q* to the effect that a particular future contingent proposition *Fp* or counterfactual of creaturely freedom F^t*(p) on H*, is true? If *q* is now true, then, as a present-tense proposition, God must know it. Indeed, *q* seems to have an evident truthmaker, namely, the inherence of the property of truth in *Fp* or F^t*(p) on H*. The state of affairs of *Fp's being true* is not only a contingent state of affairs which presently obtains in the world, but *Fp's being true* is literally an event, since *Fp* may change in its truth value once *p* becomes true, in which case *q* undergoes an intrinsic change from being true to being false. Thus, if *q,* God must know that *q* and, hence, know that *Fp* and F^t*(p) on H* are true. But if he knows that these propositions are true, then he knows the facts which they state. Thus, anyone who agrees that the Principle of Bivalence governs future contingent propositions or counterfactuals of creaturely freedom and who holds that God knows all presently true propositions or is immediately acquainted with all existing truthmakers cannot on pain of incoherence deny that God knows the truth of future contingent propositions and counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. This conclusion presents a real crisis for thinkers like Hasker whose only escape from theological fatalism is to deny God's foreknowledge of true future contingent propositions.

of creaturely freedom are members of the class of propositions or statements which require truthmakers if they are to be true.

But suppose that future-tense statements and counterfactuals of creaturely freedom do belong to that class of propositions or statements requiring truthmakers in order to be true. What is wrong with the facts or states of affairs proposed by Freddoso as the truthmakers of such propositions? O'Connor's declamation, "Freddoso's suggestion is just wrong, for there is not anything 'there' in the world which is its grounds"[137] reveals that he is presupposing the same naïve understanding of truthmakers exposed earlier. Facts or states of affairs such as Freddoso mentions routinely serve as perfectly respectable truthmakers. Perhaps one could try to exclude Freddoso's truthmakers by putting an anti-realist spin on facts and states of affairs, but the anti-Molinist can hardly think that an objection based on such a metaphysical thesis will have more warrant than the affirmation that there are true future-tense statements and counterfactuals of creaturely freedom.

O'Connor also argues that Freddoso's view spawns a vicious infinite regress of grounds of truth. For a true future-tense proposition *Fp* is said to have grounds of its truth just in case there will be grounds of the truth of *p* at some future time. Here the grounds of the truth of *Fp* are stated by means of another statement which is also of the form *Fp*. We are off on an infinite regress, O'Connor insists, which is vicious because no statement has unconditional grounds of its truth.[138] But O'Connor has conflated the truthmaker of *Fp* with the truth-conditions of the statement that *Fp* has a truthmaker. On Freddoso's view the truthmaker of any proposition *Fp* is the fact that *there will be a truthmaker of p*. Facts do not themselves have truthmakers, so there is no regress.

Nevertheless, O'Connor's objection is helpful in that it draws attention to the fact that even Freddoso's account of the truthmakers of future-tense propositions requires the existence of tensed facts, a point which is insisted upon independently by advocates of a tensed theory of time,[139] which, it will be recalled, is presupposed by this version of truthmaking for tensed sentences. That raises the question whether we might not as well just let the relevant tensed facts be the truthmakers of tensed propositions. The regress spotted by O'Connor concerns the truth-conditions of the sentence "There are now grounds for the truth of *Fp*," and this regress is benign, since it is simply a series of entailments of one future-tense proposition by another.

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[137] O'Connor, "Impossibility," 155.

[138] O'Connor, 155–156.

[139] See discussion in my *The Tensed Theory of Time: A Critical Examination,* Synthèse Library (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), chap. 3 passim. Michael Tooley would be a rare exception.

Indeed, O'Connor had better hope that such a regress is benign, since on his *own* view Freddoso's formula does successfully give the truth-conditions of any future-tense proposition *Fp*, viz.:

56. $Fp \equiv p$ will have grounds at some future time t.

Since the right-hand side of the equivalence has itself the form *Fp*, one embarks on an infinite regress. In agreeing that Freddoso's formula does successfully give the truth conditions of a future-tense proposition despite the infinite regress involved, O'Connor tacitly agrees that such a regress is benign. O'Connor protests that he does not face the same problem as Freddoso because "this biconditional is not intended to prescribe a procedure by which it may be determined whether a future contingent is *grounded*–it is simply indicating that it . . . is in fact true."[140] This alleged difference, however, is rooted in O'Connor's confusion noted above concerning the truthmaker of *Fp* and the truth-conditions of "*Fp* has a truthmaker"; there is on his own view still a (benign) infinite regress because the right-hand side of the above equivalence has itself the form *Fp*. O'Connor also defends himself by saying that his adaptation of Freddoso's formula is not a prescription of "how one may determine whether such propositions are true."[141] But, of course, neither is Freddoso intending to provide a prescription for determining in O'Connor's epistemic sense whether *Fp* does have a truthmaker or not.

Similarly, when we turn from future-tense propositions to counterfactual propositions and consider Freddoso's proposed truthmakers for counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, we see that O'Connor's denial that "there is something 'there "objectively" to be known'"[142] is rooted in the same crude understanding of truthmakers already exposed. As for the supposedly vicious infinite regress, it is again a benign regress of entailments generated by the truth-conditions of the statement "F^t *(p) on H* has a truthmaker."

That the regress concerns truth-conditions, not truthmakers, is especially evident in Flint's defense of Freddoso's position. Flint proposes the following formula to give the truthmaker of a counterfactual of creaturely freedom $c \mathrel{\Box\!\!\rightarrow} z$:

57. "It *would be* the case (if *c* were true) that *z*" is now grounded iff "*z* is grounded" *would be* the case (if *c* were true).[143]

[140] O'Connor, "Impossibility," 164–165.
[141] O'Connor, 165.
[142] O'Connor, 160.
[143] Flint, *Divine Providence,* 133.

It is evident that what is provided here are truth conditions for the claim that "$c \mathrel{\Box\!\!\rightarrow} z$ is now grounded," not a truthmaker for $c \mathrel{\Box\!\!\rightarrow} z$. In fact, ironically, Flint never really does tell us what the truthmaker of $c \mathrel{\Box\!\!\rightarrow} z$ is! He misconstrues his own account when he says, for example, that a person's activity in a nearby possible world is what grounds a counterfactual of creaturely freedom that is true in the actual world.[144] Such an interpretation conjures up ghostly images of merely possible agents doing things in their worlds which produce causal effects in ours, surely a bizarre and untenable picture! Rather on the Freddoso-Flint view, the truthmaker of $c \mathrel{\Box\!\!\rightarrow} z$ is something like the fact that *the statement "z has a truthmaker" would be true* (*if c were true*). This fact or state of affairs exists or obtains as robustly in the actual world as any other actual fact or state of affairs and is an unobjectionable truthmaker. Thus it is a misconceived worry to wonder how merely possible activities ground actual truths, just as it is a misconceived worry to puzzle over how non-existent past or future activities could ground present truths. They do not.

For my part, I should say that if true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom have truthmakers, then the most obvious and plausible candidates are the facts or states of affairs disclosed by the disquotation principle. Thus, what makes it true that "If I were rich, I would buy a Mercedes," is the fact that if I were rich I would buy a Mercedes. Just as there are tensed facts about the past or future which now exist, even though the objects and events they are about do not, so there are counterfacts which actually exist, even though the objects and events they are about do not. If counterfactuals of creaturely freedom require truthmakers, then it is in virtue of these facts or states of affairs that the corresponding propositions are true. And since these counterfacts are not the result of God's decree, the relevant states of affairs must obtain even logically prior to God's decree to create any concrete objects.

In his development of the grounding objection, Hasker does seem to countenance states of affairs as truthmakers. But, he insists, "In order for a (contingent) conditional state of affairs to obtain, its obtaining must be grounded in some categorical state of affairs. More colloquially, truths about 'what *would be the case . . . if*' must be grounded in truths about what *is in fact* the case."[145] For example, the truth of counterfactuals like "If the glass were struck, it would shatter" is grounded "in the natures,

[144] Flint, 133. Cf. his remark that "counterfactuals of creaturely freedom do indeed have grounds, though (as with propositions about the past or the future, or about what is metaphysically possible) we might not find such grounds at the present time or in the actual world" (Thomas P. Flint, "Omniscience," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig [London: Routledge, 1998], 7:107–112).
[145] Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge,* 30.

causal powers, inherent tendencies, and the like, of the natural entities described in them."[146]

Hasker's claim is, however, very muddled. An obtaining state of affairs just is the ground or truthmaker of some truth and so is not itself "grounded" in the relevant sense. Moreover, truths do not have other truths as their grounds or truthmakers, but rather states of affairs. With respect to counterfactuals concerning instances of natural kinds like the glass, the truth of the counterfactual is arguably grounded in a dispositional property of the object, such as in this case the glass's fragility. Such a dispositional property may be plausibly taken to be the truthmaker of the relevant counterfactual and even to ensure its necessary truth.[147] Moreover, it is correct to say that dispositional properties have a causal basis in the categorical properties of a natural object, such as the molecular structure of the glass. But it is a *non sequitur* to conclude that the causal basis of a disposition is the truthmaker of the relevant counterfactual. For if there were different laws of nature, that same molecular structure might not serve to make glass fragile. It is the glass's fragility which is the truthmaker of the counterfactual at issue, and the causal basis of the disposition is at most responsible, not for the glass's fragility, but for the manifestation of that fragility, that is to say, for the actual shattering of the glass. Thus, in Armstrong's analysis the truthmaker for the categorical statement "The glass is fragile" is the glass's having a certain molecular structure plus the laws of nature.[148] But the rub is that laws of nature, as Plantinga observes,[149] are equivalent to various counterfactual propositions, like "If *x* were cooled to 0°, it would expand," so that one might just as well have said that the truthmaker of "The glass is fragile" is the glass's having a certain molecular structure plus certain counterfacts of nature. Thus, even a categorical statement concerning dispositional properties of a natural object arguably has among its truthmakers certain counterfacts, not to speak of a counterfactual statement grounded in the dispositional properties of an object. Thus, Hasker's claim that counterfactuals must be purely categorically grounded is unwarranted.

How much more dubious is Hasker's claim when it comes to personal agents endowed with freedom of the will! For free choice is not a matter of natural dispositions involving causal bases. Indeed, as I have elsewhere

[146] Hasker, 30.
[147] See Elizabeth W. Prior, Robert Pargetter, and Frank Jackson, "Three Theses about Dispositions," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (1982): 251–257; Robert Pargetter and Elizabeth W. Prior, "The Dispositional and the Categorical," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (1982): 366–370.
[148] Armstrong, *States of Affairs,* 70–73, 129.
[149] Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity,* Clarendon Library of Logic and Philosophy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 178.

charged,[150] the grounding objection seems implicitly to reject libertarian freedom, for on a libertarian view there is no further "grounding" to be sought for why there obtains a certain counterfactual state of affairs about how some agent would freely act under certain circumstances. To seek an answer to the question "Why is *F* a fact?" or "What makes *F* a fact?" is implicitly to deny libertarian freedom. It is simply a fact that that is how that agent would freely choose to act under those circumstances.

In short, I agree with Plantinga that I am far more confident that there are true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom than I am of the theory which requires that they have truthmakers.[151] And if they do require truthmakers, no reason has been given why their truthmakers cannot be the facts or states of affairs which are disclosed by the disquotation principle.

6.4.3.2 Are Counterfactuals True Prior to God's Decree?

We have persuasive grounds for thinking that there are true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom and no good reasons for thinking that none of them is true. But are they true explanatorily prior to God's decree of a world? Again, Adams speaks to this issue, claiming that "the truth of the crucial conditionals cannot be settled soon enough to be of use to God."[152] Adams' point seems to be this: the subjunctive conditionals which God entertains as truths to guide him in his deliberation of which world to actualize can be true only if a world already obtains. But then it is too late for God to use such counterfactuals in his decision-making to actualize a world. Adams' own exposition of the objection is beset with difficulties,[153] but Anthony Kenny has given us a clearer exposition.[154] According to the popular Lewis-Stalnaker possible worlds semantics for counterfactual conditionals,[155] counterfactuals are true or false relative to a world *W*. We are to consider all possible worlds arranged according to their degree of similarity to *W*. The next step is to pick out those worlds which are most similar to *W* and in which the antecedent of the counterfactual conditional

[150] Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, 261–262.

[151] See Alvin Plantinga's simple retort to the grounding objection: "It seems to me much clearer that some counterfactuals of freedom are at least possibly true than that the truth of propositions must, in general, be grounded in this way" (Alvin Plantinga, "Reply to Robert Adams," in *Alvin Plantinga,* ed. James E. Tomberlin and Peter Van Inwagen [Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1985], 378). Cf. the remark of Mulligan, Simons, and Smith, "Truth-Makers," 299: it is "perfectly rational for us to know *that* a sentence is true and yet not know completely *what* makes it true."

[152] Adams, "Middle Knowledge," 113.

[153] See Plantinga, "Reply to Adams," 378; Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, 264.

[154] Kenny, *God of the Philosophers*, 68–69.

[155] David Lewis, *Counterfactuals*, Library of Philosophy and Logic (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973); Robert C. Stalnaker, "A Theory of Conditionals," in *Studies in Logical Theory*, ed. Nicholas Rescher, American Philosophical Quarterly Monograph Series 2 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), 98–112.

is true. The counterfactual conditional as a whole is true in *W* just in case in all these worlds the consequent is also true. To give an example, the counterfactual statement "If Lyndon Johnson had run for a second term, then he would have been elected" is true in the actual world if and only if in all the possible worlds which are most similar to the actual world and in which it is true that "Johnson runs for a second term," it is also true that "Johnson is elected."

Kenny points out that it is not enough for God to know which counterfactuals are true at which worlds in order to have middle knowledge. Rather God must know which counterfactuals are in fact true. But in order for certain counterfactuals to be in fact true the actual world must obtain so as to serve as the point of reference for the determination of similarity of worlds to it. But in the logical moment prior to God's creative decree there is no actual world yet. For we are talking about a moment before God decrees to create the world; indeed, middle knowledge is supposed to help God decide which world to make actual. But if there is at that moment no actual world yet, statements whose truth-value depends on which possible worlds are closest to the actual world cannot be true, for there is as yet no world to be closest to. Therefore, counterfactual statements about what persons would do under different circumstances cannot be true at that point and, hence, cannot be known by God. Only after his decree to create the world can such statements be true, for it is only then that an actual world exists to serve as the reference point to which all possible worlds are to be compared. But then such statements are true too late to serve as God's guides in deciding which world to decree. Thus, God cannot have middle knowledge.

Now at this point the Molinist might simply reject the currently fashionable possible worlds semantics for counterfactual conditionals, which never contemplated so arcane a doctrine as divine middle knowledge. But is the currently popular semantics really inadequate for the task? I think not. For parallel to the three moments in God's knowledge of the world there is a sort of logical progression in the instantiation of the actual world.

In the first moment, which corresponds to God's natural knowledge, those aspects of the actual world obtain which are broadly logically necessary states of affairs. For example, in this first moment, the state of affairs corresponding to the proposition $7 + 5 = 12$ is already actual. So in this first moment, there are indefinitely many states of the world which are already actual, namely, logically necessary states of affairs, which could not possibly be otherwise.

In the second moment, at which God has middle knowledge, those aspects of the actual world obtain which are states of affairs concerning

what free creatures would do in any set of circumstances. For example, in this second moment the counterfactual state of affairs corresponding to the proposition *If Jones were placed in circumstances C, then he would freely do action A* is actual. Of course, neither Jones nor the circumstances yet exist. But it is nevertheless the case that if Jones were to be actualized by God and placed in *C*, then Jones would freely do *A*. Thus, the states of affairs which are expressed by true counterfactuals concerning free decisions by humans are in fact already actual at this second moment. So even though at this moment the actual world in all its fullness does not yet obtain, nonetheless certain aspects of it already obtain, namely, broadly logically necessary states of affairs and states of affairs corresponding to true counterfactuals concerning creaturely freedom.[156]

Finally, in the third moment, after the creative decree of the divine will, all remaining aspects of the actual world obtain. For example, the state of affairs corresponding to the proposition *In A.D. 1972 Jones marries his fiancée* is actual. By this third logical moment, the actual world is complete in all its aspects.

Another way of grasping this logically progressive instantiation of the world is to realize that only those states of affairs which depend on God's will for their actualization have to wait for the third moment and the creative decree of the divine will. Those states of affairs which are not so dependent are already actual prior to the decision of the divine will concerning which world to create. Indeed, as we have seen, those already actual states of affairs limit God's options in deciding which world to actualize: he cannot actualize a world involving a logical contradiction or a false counterfactual of creaturely freedom. Thus, for example, it was not open to him to make a world containing square circles or a world in which Peter, if placed in precisely the same circumstances he was placed in, would not deny Christ.

This understanding of the progressive instantiation of the world undermines Kenny's objection, which is based on the assumption that at the

[156] It might be said that since libertarian freedom requires the ability of creatures to choose differently in identical circumstances, equally similar worlds could not support true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. For in equally similar worlds free creatures will choose differently, so that the consequents of such counterfactuals would not be uniformly true in all antecedent-permitting worlds. But as Alvin Plantinga has argued, shared counterfactuals are themselves a measure of similarity between worlds (*Nature of Necessity*, 176–179). Since sharing counterfactuals is itself a criterion of similarity, it might seem that the popular possible world semantics for the truth conditions of counterfactuals in terms of truth in the most similar possible worlds is viciously circular or trivial. But Plantinga denies this, commenting that it follows only that we cannot as a rule *discover* the truth value of a counterfactual by asking whether its consequent holds in those worlds most similar to the actual world in which the antecedent holds. The semantics is not to be understood as explaining why certain counterfactuals are true or false but simply as providing an account of their truth conditions, what it is for a counterfactual to be true or false.

second moment the actual world does not obtain.[157] For we have seen that at this moment aspects of the actual world do already obtain, including states of affairs expressed by certain counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. Since these counterfactuals correspond to reality, they are at this point true and their contradictories false. Since the relevant states of affairs are actual, one can hold to both the doctrine of divine middle knowledge and the current semantics for what it means for a counterfactual to be true: in those possible worlds which are most similar to the actual world (insofar as it obtains at the moment) and in which the antecedent is true, the consequent is also true.

Unfazed by the failure of his argument, Adams subsequently offered a new anti-Molinist argument against the possibility of the truth of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom explanatorily prior to God's decree.[158] Adams argues that if Molinism is true, then if I freely do *A* in *C*, the truth of the counterfactual of creaturely freedom "If I were in *C*, then I would freely do *A*" both is and is not explanatorily prior to my acting as I do in *C*. Since that is impossible, it follows that if Molinism is true, then I do not freely do *A* in *C*.

Adams' new argument is, however, no more successful than his earlier argument because the notion of "explanatory priority," as it plays a role in the argument, is equivocal, so that the truth of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom could be explanatorily prior to our decisions and actions in one sense but not in another sense.[159] The truth of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom is prior to God's decree in the sense of providing a partial reason for that decree, but the priority of God's decree to our existence is a sort of causal or ontic priority that is inapplicable to the priority of the truth of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom to God's decree. If some general sense of "explanatory priority" that is applicable to both cases can be crafted, there is no reason to expect it to be transitive, as required by Adams' argument. Indeed, neither of the above senses of "explanatory priority" has application to the peculiar alleged priority of the truth of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom to all of our decisions and actions.

Although Hasker has attempted to re-defend a version of Adams' new anti-Molinist argument,[160] the sense of "explanatory priority" operative in

[157] See also Kvanvig, *All-Knowing God*, 145.
[158] Robert Merrihew Adams, "An Anti-Molinist Argument," in *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 343–353.
[159] See my "Robert Adams' New Anti-Molinist Argument," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 54, no. 4 (1994): 857–861.
[160] William Hasker, "Middle Knowledge: a Refutation Revisited," *Faith and Philosophy* 12 (1995): 223–236; William Hasker, "Explanatory Priority: Transitive and Unequivocal, A Reply to William Craig," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57, no. 2 (1997): 389–393.

Hasker's argument remains equivocal, or if a univocal sense can be given to it, it is either so generic that we should have to deny its transitivity or so weak that it would not be incompatible with human freedom.[161]

6.4.4 Summary

Thomas Flint considers the major objections to the Molinist doctrine of middle knowledge to have been answered, so that the job of applying this doctrine theologically can get underway.[162] While it is too much to hope that the detractors of *scientia media* will retreat into silence, still I think that the Molinist can be pretty confident that it is unlikely that after literally centuries of discussion an argument showing the incoherence of the doctrine will be forthcoming. So let the theological application proceed!

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[161] See my "On Hasker's Defense of Anti-Molinism," *Faith and Philosophy* 15, no. 2 (1998): 236–240. In his rejoinder, "Anti-Molinism Is Undefeated!," *Faith and Philosophy* 17, no. 1 (2000): 126–131, Hasker effectively shows that if we substitute for a counterfactual of freedom one's fallible belief in that counterfactual, then my proposed counter-example no longer works; but no wonder, for then it ceases to be an illustration of either the truth of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom or of divine middle knowledge! Hasker charges that if we stipulate that the belief in question was imparted by God and so is infallible, then my argument becomes question-begging. But that charge seems incorrect: the goal of offering an illustration of a target doctrine is to construct so tightly parallel an illustration that the intuitive coherence of the illustration goes to support the target doctrine against charges of incoherence. My example is meant to be an illustration parallel to the truth of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom; our infallible belief would then be parallel to divine middle knowledge. Since the issue before us, as Hasker acknowledges, is "the coherence of the Molinist account" rather than its truth, there is nothing question-begging about using a truly parallel illustration in order to defend the coherence of the Molinist account. The illustration effectively shows that if "explanatory priority" is univocal, then it has not been shown to be transitive; indeed, quite the contrary.

Again, in response to my counter-example to the transitivity of Hasker's sense of "explanatory priority," Hasker changes my illustration so that the condition of irreflexivity is no longer violated. In Hasker's version, it is no longer the case that John wants to go to the party because Mary is going and Mary wants to go because John is going. Hasker complains that stipulating an explanatory relation that violates asymmetry does not make such a relation possible, so that a counter-example that depends on such an arbitrary stipulation has little force. I demur. Since it is up to the anti-Molinist to show that this illustration is metaphysically impossible, and since Hasker has not shown that, I see nothing defective with my counter-example.

In response to my claim that Adams' argument depends upon the fallacious reasoning of fatalism, Hasker surprises us by asserting that the reasoning behind Adams' objection "involves the fact that a certain state of affairs is integral to the causal process that leads to a later situation" (129). Now while it is true that the divine decree is a causal process that is guided by the truth of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, nonetheless there is nothing in Adams' argument that suggests that there is a non-logical constraint upon our decisions and actions, as though Adams' objection were an argument for causal determinism, not fatalism.

As for my claim that the anti-Molinist has not shown that my being able to refrain from doing *A* in *C* is a necessary condition of my freely doing *A* in *C*, I see nothing wrong, *pace* Hasker, with appealing to Flint's Molinist examples of the Pope's freely promulgating true doctrine even though he did not have the ability to do the opposite, any more than appealing to Frankfurtian examples. Since the issue is again the coherence of Molinism rather than its truth, there is nothing question-begging about using such intuitive counter-examples in defense of its coherence.

[162] Flint, "Doctrine of Infallibility," 374. Cf. Plantinga's judgement that there simply is no sound philosophical objection to the doctrine of divine middle knowledge (Plantinga, "Reply to Adams," 378–379).

6.5 Concluding Remarks

Our study of divine omniscience has proved rewarding. We have seen that perfect being theology enjoins us to construe biblical assertions of God's unlimited knowledge to entail omniscience, a doctrine which is capable of coherent formulation. Moreover, we have seen that the Bible teaches that God has knowledge of future contingents. Not only can this doctrine be successfully defended against objections such as theological fatalism, but there are also persuasive philosophical grounds to affirm this biblical doctrine. Most remarkably, we have seen good reasons, both theological and philosophical, for affirming that God's omniscience comprises middle knowledge and that objections to this doctrine are not probative. Therefore the Christian systematic philosophical theologian should feel free to avail himself in his work of not only divine foreknowledge of future contingents but also of divine middle knowledge of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom logically prior to God's decree to create our world.

7
Eternity

"God," declares the prophet Isaiah, "is the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity" (Is 57.15). But being a prophet and not a philosophical theologian, Isaiah did not pause to reflect upon the *nature* of divine eternity. Minimally, to be eternal means to exist without beginning and end. To say that God is eternal means minimally that he never came into being and will never go out of being. To exist eternally is to exist permanently.[1]

There are, however, at least two ways in which something could exist eternally. One way would be to exist omnitemporally throughout infinite time. In this case God would have an immemorial and everlasting temporal duration. This seems have been Aristotle's view, for God, as the first unmoved mover in Aristotle's cosmology, is the cause of the co-eternal motion of the spheres.[2] The other way in which a being could exist eternally would be by existing timelessly. In this case God would completely transcend time, having neither temporal location nor temporal extension. He would simply exist in an undifferentiated, timeless state. This was

[1] For an analysis of what it means to be permanent, see Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 133; cf. Quentin Smith, "A New Typology of Temporal and Atemporal Permanence," *Noûs* 23, no. 3 (1989): 307–330. According to Leftow an entity is permanent if and only if it exists and has no first or last finite period of existence, and there are no moments before or after it exists.

[2] Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Λ.6.1071b4–20. For discussion, see my *The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz*, Library of Philosophy and Religion (London: Macmillan, 1980), 20–47.

Systematic Philosophical Theology: On God: Attributes of God, Volume IIa, First Edition.
William Lane Craig.
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the view of Plotinus, who held that the One is strictly timeless.[3] Under the influence of Neo-Platonism, Christian theologians like Augustine, Boethius, Anselm, and Aquinas held that God transcends time and is therefore timeless, despite his being active in the world.[4]

7.1 Biblical Data Concerning Divine Eternity

Since we take Scripture as our primary guide in theological matters, the initial question we must ask is: does the biblical teaching on divine eternity favor either one of these views? The question turns out to be surprisingly difficult to answer. On the one hand, it is indisputable that the biblical writers typically portray God as engaged in temporal activities, including foreknowing the future and remembering the past, and when they speak directly of God's eternal existence they do so in terms of beginningless and endless temporal duration: "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting thou art God" (Ps 90.2). "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" (Rev 4.8b). After surveying the biblical data on divine eternity, Alan Padgett concludes, "the Bible knows nothing of a timeless divine eternity in the traditional sense."[5]

Defenders of divine timelessness might suggest that the biblical authors lacked the conceptual categories for enunciating a doctrine of divine timelessness, so that their temporal descriptions of God need not be taken literally. But Padgett cites II Enoch 65.6–7 as evidence that the conception of timeless existence was not beyond the reach of biblical writers:

> And then the whole creation, visible and invisible, which the Lord has created, shall come to an end, then each person will go to the Lord's great judgment. And then all time will perish, and afterward there will be neither years nor months nor days nor hours. They will be dissipated, and after that they will not be reckoned.

Such a passage gives us reason to think that the biblical authors, had they wished to, could have formulated a doctrine of divine timelessness.

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[3] Plotinus, *Ennead* III. 7.3.19–23. For an exposition of Plotinus' view see my *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez,* Studies in Intellectual History 7 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 93–95.

[4] For a discussion of representative texts, see Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge*, 73–78, 92–97, 99–126; William Lane Craig, "Was Thomas Aquinas a B-theorist of Time?" *New Scholasticism* 59, no. 4 (1985): 475–483.

[5] Alan G. Padgett, *God, Eternity and the Nature of Time* (New York: St. Martin's, 1992), 33.

Paul Helm raises a more subtle objection to the inference that the authors of Scripture, in describing God in temporal terms, intended to teach that God is temporal.[6] He claims that the biblical writers lacked the "reflective context" for formulating a doctrine of divine eternity. That is to say, the issue (like the issue of geocentrism, for instance) had either never come up for explicit consideration or else simply fell outside their interests. Consider the parallel case of God's relationship to space: just as the biblical writers describe God in temporal terms, so they describe him in spatial terms as well:

> Am I a God at hand, says the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? says the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the LORD. (Jer 23.23–24)

> Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?
> Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
> If I ascend into heaven, thou art there!
> If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!
> If I take the wings of the morning
> and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
> even there thy hand shall lead me,
> and thy right hand shall hold me. (Ps 139.7–10)

Yet most theologians would not take Scripture to teach that God is literally a spatial being. The authors of Scripture were not concerned to craft a metaphysical doctrine of God's relation to space; and parity would require us to say the same of time as well. Padgett considers Helm's point to be well-taken: "The Biblical authors were not interested in philosophical speculation about eternity, and thus the intellectual context for discussing this matter may simply not have existed at that time."[7] Thus, the biblical descriptions of God as temporal may not be determinative for a doctrine of divine eternity.

Moreover, it must be said that the biblical data are not so one-sidedly in favor of divine temporality as Padgett would have us believe. Johannes Schmidt, whose *Ewigkeitsbegriff im alten Testament* Padgett calls "the longest and most thorough book on the concept of eternity in the OT,"[8] argues for a biblical doctrine of divine timelessness on the basis of creation texts like Gen 1.1 and Prov 8.22–23.[9] Padgett dismisses Schmidt's contention

[6] Paul Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God without Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 5–11.
[7] Padgett, *Nature of Time*, 36.
[8] Padgett, 24.
[9] Johannes Schmidt, *Der Ewigkeitsbegriff im alten Testament*, Alttestamentliche Abhandlungen 13, no. 5 (Münster in Westfalen: Verlag des Aschendorffschen Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1940), 31–32.

with the comment, "Neither of these texts teaches or implies that time began with creation, or indeed say [*sic*] anything about time or eternity."[10] This summary dismissal is all too quick. Gen 1.1, which is likely neither a subordinate clause nor a summary title,[11] states, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." According to James Barr, this absolute beginning, taken in conjunction with the expression "And there was evening and there was morning, one day" (v. 5), indicating the first day, may very well be intended to teach that the beginning was not simply the beginning of the physical universe, but the beginning of time itself and that, consequently, God may be thought of as timeless.[12] This conclusion is rendered all the more plausible when the Genesis account of creation is read against the backdrop of ancient Egyptian cosmogony.[13] Egyptian cosmogony includes the idea that creation took place at "the first time" *(sp tpy)*. Analyzing the relevant texts, John Currid takes both the Egyptian and the Hebrew cosmogonies to involve the notion that the moment of creation is the beginning of time.[14] Moreover, certain NT authors may be taken to construe Gen 1.1 as referring to the beginning of time. The most striking NT reflection on Gen 1.1 is, of course, Jn 1.1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made." Here the uncreated Logos, the source of all created things, was already with God and was God at the moment of creation. It is not hard to interpret this passage in terms of the Word's timeless unity with God – nor would it be anachronistic to do so, given the first century Jewish philosopher Philo's doctrine of the divine Logos and Philo's holding that time begins with creation.[15]

As for Prov 8.22–23, this passage is certainly capable of being read in terms of a beginning of time. The doctrine of creation was a centerpiece of Jewish Wisdom literature and aimed to show God's sovereignty over all creation. Here Wisdom, personified as a woman, speaks:

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[10] Padgett, *Nature of Time*, 25.

[11] See exegesis by Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, trans. John Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 97; John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, Expositor's Bible Commentary 2 (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan, 1990), 21–22.

[12] James Barr, *Biblical Words for Time* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 145–147.

[13] See John D. Currid, "An Examination of the Egyptian Background of the Genesis Cosmogony," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 35 (1991): 18–40.

[14] Currid, "Egyptian Background," 30.

[15] For a discussion of the similarities between John's prologue and Philo's *On the Creation of the World according to Moses* 16–19, in which his Logos doctrine of creation is described, see C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 66–73, 276–277; Jutta Leonhardt-Balzer, "Der Logos und die Schöpfung: Streiflichter bei Philo (Op 20–25) und im Johannesprolog (Joh 1, 1–18)," in *Kontexte des Johannesevangeliums*, ed. Jörg Frey and Udo Schnelle, WUNT 175 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), pp. 295–320. On the timelessness of the Logos sans creation, see Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 203–209.

> The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his way,
> Before his works of old.
> From everlasting I was established,
> From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth.

The passage, which doubtless looks back to Gen 1.1, is brimming with temporal expressions for a beginning. R. N. Whybray comments,

> It should be noted how the writer. . . was so insistent on pressing home the fact of Wisdom's unimaginable antiquity that he piled up every available synonym in a deluge of tautologies: *rē'šît*, **beginning,** *qedem*, **the first,** *mē'āz*, **of old,** *mē'ōlām*, **ages ago,** *mērō'š*, **at the first** or 'from the beginning' (compare Isa. 40.21; 41.4, 26), *miqqad^e^mê'āres*, **before the beginning of the earth:** the emphasis is not so much on the *mode* of Wisdom's coming into existence, . . . but on the *fact* of her antiquity.[16]

The expressions emphasize, however, not Wisdom's mere antiquity, but that there was a beginning, a departure point, at or before which Wisdom existed. This was a departure point not merely for the Earth, but for time and the ages; it was simply the beginning. Commenting on this text, Otto Plöger concludes that through God's creative work "the possibility of speaking of 'time' was first given; thus, before this time, right at the beginning, Wisdom came into existence through Yahweh [the LORD]."[17] The passage was so understood by other ancient writers. The Septuagint renders *me'olam* in Prov 8.23 as *pro tou aiōnos* (before time), and Sirach 24.9 has Wisdom say, "Before the ages, in the beginning, he created me, and for all ages I shall not cease to be" (cf. 16.26; 23.20).

Significantly, certain NT passages also seem to affirm a beginning of time. This would imply just the same sort of timelessness "before" the creation of the world which Padgett sees in II Enoch "after" the end of the world. For example, we read in Jude 25, "to the only God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, *before all time* and *now* and *forever*" (*pro pantos tou aiōnos kai nun kai eis pantas tous aiōnas*). The passage contemplates an everlasting future duration but affirms a beginning to past time and implies God's existence, using an almost inevitable *façon de parler*, "before" time began. Similar expressions are found in two intriguing passages in the pastoral epistles. In Tit 1.2–3, in a passage laden with temporal

[16] R. N. Whybray, *Proverbs*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 131–132.

[17] Otto Plöger, *Sprüche Salomos*, Biblisches Kommentar altes Testaments 17 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, Germany: Neukirchner Verlag, 1984), 92. Cf. Arndt Meinhold's comment: "Its [time's] beginning is set at the first act of creation" (Arndt Meinhold, *Die Sprüche*, Zürcher Bibelkommentare [Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1991], 1:144).

language, we read of those chosen by God "in hope of eternal life *(zōēs aiōniou)* which God, who never lies, promised before age-long time *(pro chronōn aiōniōn)* but manifested at the proper time *(kairois idiois)*." And in II Tim 1.9 we read of God's "purpose and grace, which were given to us in Christ Jesus before age-long time *(pro chronōn aiōniōn)*, but now (*nun*) manifested by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus." Arndt and Gingrich render *pro chronōn aiōniōn* as "before time began."[18] Similarly, in I Cor 2.7 Paul speaks of a secret, hidden wisdom of God "which God decreed before the ages *(pro tōn aiōnōn)* for our glorification." Such expressions are in line with the Septuagint, which describes God as "the one who exists before the ages *(ho hyparchōn pro tōn aiōnōn)*" (LXX Ps. 54.20 [Ps 55.19]). Expressions like *ek tou aiōnos* or *apo tōn aiōnōn* might be taken to mean "from ancient times" or "from eternity." But these should not be conflated with *pro* expressions. That such *pro* constructions are to be taken seriously and not merely as idioms connoting "for long ages" (cf. Rom 16.25: *chronois aiōniois)* is confirmed by the many similar expressions concerning God and his decrees "before the foundation of the world" *(pro katabolēs kosmou)* (Jn 17.24; Eph. 1.4; I Pet 1.20; cf. Rev 13.8). Evidently it was a common understanding of the creation described in Gen 1.1 that the beginning of the world was coincident with the beginning of time or the ages; but since God did not begin to exist at the moment of creation, it therefore followed that he existed "before" the beginning of time. God, at least "before" creation, must therefore be atemporal.

Thus, although scriptural authors speak of God as temporal and everlasting, there is some evidence, at least, that when God is considered in relation to creation he must be thought of as the transcendent Creator of time and the ages and therefore as existing beyond time. It may well be the case that in the context of the doctrine of creation the biblical writers were led to reflect on God's relationship to time and chose to affirm his transcendence. Still the evidence is not clear, and we seem forced to conclude with Barr that "if such a thing as a Christian doctrine of time has to be developed, the work of discussing it and developing it must belong not to biblical but to philosophical theology."[19]

What is at issue here is God's relationship to time: Does God exist temporally or atemporally? God exists temporally if and only if he exists in time, that is to say, if and only if his duration has phases which are related to one another as earlier and later. In that case, God, as a personal being, has experientially a past, a present, and a future. No matter what moment

[18] *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, by W. Bauer, trans. and ed. W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *s.v.* "αἰώνιος."
[19] Barr, *Biblical Words for Time*, 149.

in time we pick, given God's permanence, the assertion, "God exists now," were we to make it, would be literally true. By contrast, God exists atemporally if and only if he is not temporal. This definition makes it evident that temporality and timelessness are contradictories: an entity must exist one way or the other and cannot exist both ways at once. If, then, God exists atemporally, he has no past, present, and future. At any moment in time it would be true to assert, "God exists," in the tenseless sense of "exists," as when one says, "The natural numbers exist," but not true to assert, "God exists now."

Philosophical theologians have been sharply divided with respect to God's relationship to time. What are the principal arguments which they have offered for divine timelessness and temporality respectively?

7.2 Arguments for Divine Timelessness

Consider first arguments that God exists timelessly.[20]

7.2.1 Divine Simplicity

A quick and easy demonstration of divine timelessness might appeal to a strong doctrine of divine simplicity as a basis for affirming God's atemporality.[21] For a simple God could change neither intrinsically nor extrinsically, since he has no properties as such nor stands in any real relation to things, whereas a temporal God would have to change at least relationally with respect to the different moments of time at which he exists. The problem with such an argument, however, is that the doctrine of divine simplicity is, as we have seen, even more difficult and controversial than the doctrine of divine timelessness, so that to try to prove the latter doctrine on the basis of the former is to try to prove what is not obvious on the basis of the even less obvious. Thus we must look elsewhere for persuasive arguments for divine timelessness.

[20] In his major study *Time and Eternity*, chap. 12, Brian Leftow provides a catalogue of well over a dozen arguments in defense of divine timelessness. For a detailed discussion of his arguments, see my *God, Time, and Eternity: The Coherence of Theism II: Eternity* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), chap. 1.

[21] Alternatively, one might forfeit divine simplicity and appeal to divine immutability alone. For even if he is complex, an immutable God cannot be temporal, since a temporal God would change at least extrinsically in relation to changing things. But a doctrine of divine immutability sufficiently strong to support divine timelessness finds no support in Scripture, which at most speaks of God's immutability in terms of his faithfulness and unchanging character (Mal 3.6; Jas 1.17), and philosophically there seem to be no good reasons from perfect being theology to embrace so strong a doctrine.

7.2.2 Divine Knowledge of Future Contingents

In contrast to divine simplicity and immutability, divine omniscience is clearly a great-making property and enjoys considerable scriptural warrant.[22] An argument for divine timelessness predicated upon God's omniscience would therefore have a more secure theological foundation. Many thinkers have argued that God's knowledge of future contingent events, for example, future human free decisions, implies divine timelessness. The reasoning seems to go as follows:

1. A temporal being cannot know future contingent events.
2. God knows future contingent events.
3. Therefore, God is not a temporal being.

Since temporality and timelessness are contradictories, it follows therefore that God is timeless.

Despite the denial of (2) on the part of a wide range of contemporary thinkers from process theologians to so-called "open" theists, a biblical doctrine of divine omniscience makes (2) incumbent upon an orthodox theologian.[23] The argument hinges, therefore, on the truth of (1). On behalf of (1) it is usually claimed that contingent events, not being deducible from present causes, can be known only insofar as they are real or existent. Given (2), it follows that future contingent events are real or existent for God. Defenders of divine timelessness such as Boethius, Anselm, and Aquinas thus typically maintained that all events in time are real to God and therefore can be known by him via his *scientia visionis* (knowledge of vision).[24]

How can we make sense of this claim? The most plausible move for the defender of divine timelessness to make will be to hold that the four-dimensional space-time manifold exists tenselessly and that God transcends that manifold. A good many physicists and philosophers of time and space embrace such a tenseless view of time (spacetime realism). Such a view makes sense of the traditional claim that all events in time are present to God and therefore known to him via his *scientia visionis*.

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[22] See *supra*, 185–202.

[23] I take for granted that there are contingent events such as human free decisions; for a biblical defense see my *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Grand Rapids: MI: Baker, 1987).

[24] As Aquinas writes, "For his eternity is in present contact with the whole course of time, and even passes beyond time. We may fancy that God knows the flight of time in his eternity, in the way that a person standing on top of a watch tower embraces in a single glance a whole caravan of passing travelers" (*Compendium theologiae* 133). For discussion see my *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge*, chaps. 3, 4.

The drawback of this strategy is that there is a high price to be paid philosophically and theologically for such a tenseless theory of time.[25] Therefore, the claim that contingent events can be known only insofar as they are real or existent comes at a considerable cost for the Christian theist. One is therefore inclined to be sceptical of this justification for (1).

Moreover, (1) can be directly challenged as well. In assessing the question of how God knows truths about temporal events, we have distinguished between two models of divine cognition: the *perceptualist* model and the *conceptualist* model.[26] The perceptualist model construes divine knowledge on the analogy of sense perception: God looks and sees what is there. Such a model patently underlies the classic doctrine of *scientia visionis* and is implicitly assumed when people speak of God's "foreseeing" the future. The perceptualist model of divine cognition encounters real difficulty concerning God's knowledge of future contingents, for, if future events do not exist, there is nothing there to perceive.[27]

By contrast on a conceptualist model of divine knowledge, God does not acquire his knowledge of the world by anything like perception. His knowledge of the future is not based on his "looking" ahead and "seeing" what lies in the future. Rather God's knowledge is more like a mind's knowledge of innate ideas. It is therefore inappropriate to speak of God's *acquiring* knowledge at all. Rather as an omniscient being, God has essentially the property of knowing all truths; there are truths about future events; *ergo*, God knows all truths concerning future events. So long as we are not seduced into thinking of divine foreknowledge on the model of perception, it is no longer evident why knowledge of future contingents should be impossible.

We can go further, however. For the doctrine of middle knowledge is a version of the conceptualist model which allows us to say considerably more about the basis of God's foreknowledge of future contingents.[28] Divine foreknowledge is based on (i) God's middle knowledge of what every free creature would do under any freedom-permitting circumstances and (ii) his knowledge of the divine decree to create certain sets of circumstances and to place certain free creatures in them. Given divine middle knowledge and

[25] See my *The Tenseless Theory of Time: A Critical Examination,* Synthèse Library 294 (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000).
[26] See *supra*, 250.
[27] Notice, however, that if we think of statements or facts as within God's perceptual purview, then even on a perceptualist model, God must know the future, so long as the Principle of Bivalence holds for future-tense statements. For he perceives which future-tense statements presently have the property of truth inhering in them or which future-tense facts presently exist. Thus, by means of his perception of presently existing realities he knows the truth about the future.
[28] See *supra*, 251–283.

the divine decree, foreknowledge follows immediately without any perception of the created world. We have already seen that there are powerful philosophico-theological arguments for affirming divine middle knowledge and no insuperable objections to it.

In sum, while the argument from God's knowledge of future contingents has some force in motivating a doctrine of divine timelessness, that force is mitigated by the availability of viable alternatives and the high price exacted by a tenseless theory of time.

7.2.3 Special Theory of Relativity

A popular, contemporary argument for divine timelessness arises from the concept of time in Albert Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity (STR). In order to grasp this objection, we need to have some understanding of STR. Although the mathematics of STR are not highly sophisticated, nonetheless the *concepts* of time and space defined by the theory are so strange and counter-intuitive that most people, I venture to say, find them nearly inconceivable. Undaunted, I shall attempt to explain in as simple a way as possible what Einstein's theory holds with regard to the nature of time and space, so that we may then understand how this impacts our conception of divine eternity.[29]

Let us begin by setting the theory in its historical context. The physics that prevailed up until the reception of Relativity Theory was Newtonian physics, whose foundations were laid by Isaac Newton in his epochal *Philosophiae naturalis principia mathematica* (1687). In the *Scholium* to his set of Definitions leading off the *Principia,* Newton explains his concepts of time and space. In order to clarify these concepts, Newton draws a distinction between *absolute* time and space and *relative* time and space:

> I. Absolute . . . time, of itself, and from its own nature, flows equably without relation to anything external, and by another name is called duration: relative. . . time, is some sensible and external (whether accurate or unequable) measure of duration by the means of motion, which is commonly used instead of true time; such as an hour, a day, a month, a year.
>
> II. Absolute space, in its own nature, without relation to anything external, remains always similar and immovable. Relative space is some movable dimension or measure of the absolute spaces; which our senses determine by

[29] For a detailed discussion see my *Time and the Metaphysics of Relativity*, Philosophical Studies Series 84 (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001).

> its position to bodies; and which is commonly taken for immovable space; such is the dimension of a subterraneous, an aerial, or celestial space, determined by its position in respect of the earth.[30]

Fundamentally, Newton is here distinguishing between time and space themselves and our *measures* of time and space. Relative time is the time determined or recorded by clocks and calendars of various sorts; relative space is the length or area or volume determined by instruments like rulers or measuring cups. As Newton says, these relative quantities may be more or less accurate measures of time and space themselves. Time and space themselves are absolute in the sense that they just are the quantities themselves which we are trying to measure with our physical instruments.

There is another sense in which Newton held time and space to be absolute, however. They are absolute in the sense that they are unique. There is one, universal time in which all events come to pass with determinate duration and in a determinate sequence and one, universal space in which all physical objects exist with determinate shapes and in a determinate arrangement. Thus Newton says that absolute time "of itself, and from its own nature, flows equably without relation to anything external" and absolute space "in its own nature, without relation to anything external, remains always similar and immovable." Relative times and spaces are many and variable, but not time and space themselves.

On the basis of his definitions of time and space, Newton went on to define absolute versus relative place and motion:

> III. Place is a part of space which a body takes up, and is according to the space, either absolute or relative. . . .
>
> IV. Absolute motion is the translation of a body from one absolute place into another; and relative motion, the translation from one relative place into another.[31]

By "translation" Newton means "transporting" or "displacement." Absolute place is the volume of absolute space occupied by an object, and absolute motion is the displacement of a body from one absolute place to another. An object can be at relative rest and yet in absolute motion. Newton gives the example of a piece of a ship, say, the mast. If the mast is firmly fixed, then it is at rest relative to the ship; but the mast is in absolute motion if the

[30] Isaac Newton, *Sir Isaac Newton's "Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy" and His "System of the World,"* trans. Andrew Motte (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), 1: 6.
[31] Newton, *"Mathematical Principles"*, I: 6–7.

ship is moving in absolute space as it sails along. Thus, two objects can be at rest relative to each other, but both moving in tandem through absolute space (and thus moving absolutely). Similarly, two objects – say, two asteroids – could be in motion relative to each other and yet one of them at rest in absolute space.

In Newtonian physics there is already a sort of relativity. A body which is in uniform motion (that is, no accelerations or decelerations occur) serves to define an inertial frame, which is just a relative space in which a body at rest remains at rest and a body in motion remains in motion with the same speed and direction. Newton's ship sailing uniformly along would thus define an inertial frame. Although Newton postulated the existence of an absolute inertial frame, namely, the reference frame of absolute space, nevertheless it was impossible for observers in inertial frames which were moving in absolute space to determine experimentally that they were in fact moving. If someone's relative space were moving uniformly through absolute space, that person could not tell whether he was at absolute rest or in absolute motion. By the same token, if his relative space were at rest in absolute space, he could not know that he was at absolute rest rather than in absolute motion. He could know that his inertial frame was in motion relative to some other observer's inertial frame (say, another passing ship), but he could not know if either of them were at absolute rest or in absolute motion. Thus, within Newtonian physics an observer could measure only the relative motion of his inertial system, not its absolute motion. This sort of relativity was known long before Newton. Galileo, for example, understood and illustrated it, and so this sort of relativity is usually called Galilean Relativity.

Newtonian physics prevailed all the way up through the end of the nineteenth century. The two great domains of nineteenth century classical physics were Newton's mechanics (the study of the motion of bodies) and Maxwell's electrodynamics (the study of electro-magnetic radiation, including light). The quest of physics at the end of the nineteenth century was to formulate mutually consistent theories of these two domains. The problem was that although Newton's mechanics was characterized, as we have seen, by relativity, Maxwell's electrodynamics was not. It was widely held that light (and other forms of electro-magnetic radiation) consisted of waves, and, since waves had to be waves of something (e.g., sound waves are waves of the air, ocean waves are waves of the water), light waves had to be waves of an invisible, all-permeating substance dubbed "the aether." As the nineteenth century wore on, the aether was divested of more and more of its properties until it became virtually characterless, serving only as the medium for the propagation of light. Since the speed of light had been measured and since light consisted of waves in the aether, the speed

of light was absolute, that is to say, unlike moving bodies, light's velocity was determinable relative to an absolute frame of reference, the aether frame. To be sure, in Newtonian mechanics, moving bodies *possessed* absolute velocities relative to this frame, but within an inertial frame there was no way to *measure* what it was. By contrast, electrodynamics, unlike mechanics, was not characterized by relativity. Since waves move through their medium at a constant speed regardless of how fast the object which caused them is moving, light had a determinable, fixed velocity.

But now it seemed that one could use electrodynamics to eliminate Galilean relativity. Since light moved at a fixed rate through the aether, one could, by measuring the speed of light from different directions, figure out one's own velocity relative to the aether. For if one were moving through the aether toward the light source, the speed of light should be measured as being faster than if one were at rest (just water waves would pass you more rapidly if you were swimming toward the source of the waves than if you were floating motionless in the water); whereas if one were moving through the aether away from the light source, the speed of light would be measured as being slower than if one were at rest (just as the water waves would pass you less rapidly if you were swimming away from the source of the waves than if you were floating). Thus, it would be possible to determine experimentally within an inertial frame whether one is at rest in the aether or how fast one is moving through it.

Imagine, then, the consternation when experiments, such as the famous Michelson–Morley experiment in 1887, failed to detect any motion of the Earth through the aether! Despite the fact that the Earth is orbiting the sun, the measured speed of light was identical no matter what direction their measuring device was pointed. Some scientists hypothesized that perhaps the Earth dragged the aether along with it, rather like an atmosphere, so that the aether seemed to be at rest around the moving Earth. But this explanation was ruled out by a well-established phenomenon called the aberration of starlight, which was incompatible with aether drag.

It needs to be underlined how weird the situation was. Waves travel at a constant speed regardless of the motion of their source and in this sense are unlike projectiles, which travel at a velocity which is a combination of the speed of their source plus their speed relative to the source. For example, a bullet fired ahead from a speeding police car travels at a combined speed of the car's speed plus the bullet's normal speed, in contrast to sound waves emitted from the car's siren, which travel through the air at the same velocity whether the car is stationary or in motion. Consequently, an observer who is moving in the same direction as a sound wave will observe it passing him at a slower speed than if he were at rest. If he goes fast enough, he can catch

the wave and break the sound barrier. But light waves are different. Light's measured velocity is the *same* in all inertial frames, for *all* observers. This implies, for example, that if an observer in a rocket going 90% the speed of light sent a light beam ahead of him, both he and the recipient of the beam would measure the speed of the beam to be the same, and this whether the recipient were standing still or himself moving toward or away from the light source at 90% the speed of light.

Desperate for a solution, the Irish physicist George FitzGerald and the great Dutch physicist H. A. Lorentz proposed the remarkable hypothesis that one's measuring devices shrink or contract in the direction of motion through the aether, so that light *appears* to traverse identical distances in identical times, when in fact the distances vary with one's speed. The faster one moves, the more one's devices contract, so that the measured speed of light remains constant. Hence, in all inertial frames the speed of light appears the same. With the help of the British scientist Joseph Larmor, Lorentz also came to hypothesize that one's clocks slow down when in motion relative to the aether frame. One thus winds up with Lorentzian relativity: there exists absolute motion, absolute length, and absolute time, but there is no way to discern these experimentally, since motion through the aether affects one's measuring instruments. Lorentz developed a series of equations called the Lorentz transformations which show how to transform one's own measurements of the spatial and temporal co-ordinates at which an event occurs into the measurements which would be made by someone in another inertial frame. These transformation equations remain today the mathematical core of STR, even though Lorentz's physical interpretation of STR was different from the most commonly accepted interpretation today.

In 1905 Albert Einstein, then an obscure clerk in a patent office in Berne, Switzerland, published his own version of relativity. At this time in his young career, Einstein was still a disciple of the great German physicist Ernst Mach. Mach was an ardent empiricist, who detested anything that smacked of metaphysics and who thus sought to reduce statements about entities such as time and space to statements about sense perceptions and the connections between them. The young Einstein took what he called his "epistemological credo" from Mach, holding that knowledge is made up of the totality of sense experiences and the totality of concepts and propositions, which are related in the following way: "The concepts and propositions get 'meaning,' viz., 'content,' only through their connection with sense experience."[32] Any proposition not so connected was literally

[32] Albert Einstein, "Autobiographical Notes," in *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist,* ed. Arthur Schlipp (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1949), 13.

without content, meaningless. Given such a verificationist criterion of meaning, Lorentz's absolute time, space, and motion were "metaphysical" notions and therefore meaningless.

Einstein's 1905 article in the *Annalen der Physik* has been called "the most profoundly revolutionary single paper in the history of physics."[33] He opens his paper by jettisoning the aether as superfluous, since, he says, it will not be necessary for the purposes of his paper. Now in order to talk about motion in a physically meaningful way, Einstein claims, we must be clear what we mean by "time." Since all judgements about time concern simultaneous events, what we need is a way to determine empirically the simultaneity of distant events. Einstein then proceeds to offer a method of determining, or rather defining, simultaneity for two spatially separated but relatively stationary clocks, that is, two distant clocks sharing the same inertial frame. This procedure will in turn serve as the basis for a definition of the time of an event. He asks us to assume that the time required for light to travel from point A to point B is the same as the time required for light to travel from B to A. Theoretically, light could travel more slowly from A to B and more quickly from B to A, even though the round-trip velocity was always constant. But Einstein says that we must assume that the one-way velocity of light is constant. Having made this assumption, he proposes to synchronize clocks at A and B by means of light signals from one to the other. Suppose A sends a signal to B which is in turn reflected back from B to A. If A knows what time it was when he sent the signal to B and what time it was when he received the signal back from B, then he knows that the reading of B's clock when the signal from A arrived was exactly half-way between the time A sent the signal and the time A got the return signal. In this way A and B can arrange to synchronize their clocks. Events are declared to be simultaneous if they occur at the same clock times on synchronized clocks. Using clocks thus synchronized, Einstein defines the time of an event as "the reading simultaneous with the event of a clock at rest and located at the position of the event, this clock being synchronous . . . with a specified clock at rest."[34] Now so far, the use of light as the signal plays no special role; one could have used bullets to synchronize distant clocks, so long as the bullets travel with a uniform velocity.

All this may seem quite unobjectionable and even humdrum. But in fact the very foundations of the world have just moved! It is with good reason that Banesh Hoffmann advises:

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[33] James T. Cushing, *Philosophical Concepts in Physics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 232.
[34] Albert Einstein, "On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies," trans. Arthur I. Miller, appendix to Arthur I. Miller, *Albert Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1981), 394.

> Watch closely. It will be worth the effort. But be forewarned. As we follow the gist of Einstein's argument, we shall find ourselves nodding in agreement, and later almost nodding in sleep, so obvious and unimportant will it seem. There will come a stage at which we shall barely be able to stifle a yawn. Beware. We shall by then have committed ourselves and it will be too late to avoid the jolt; for the beauty of Einstein's argument lies in its seeming innocence.[35]

Its *seeming* innocence! For under the euphemism of disregarding the aether as unnecessary, Einstein thereby abandoned not merely the aether, but, more fundamentally, the aether reference frame, or absolute space. Without absolute space there can be no absolute motion or absolute rest. Bodies are moving or at rest only relative to one another, and it would be meaningless to ask whether an isolated body was stationary or uniformly moving *per se*.

So now suppose that we have inertial frames which are moving with respect to one another, for example, a rocket ship passing near the Earth on its way to a distant planet. Suppose that when the rocket ship is close to the Earth, its clock agrees with the clock of an Earth observer. At that moment the observer on Earth sends a light signal to the planet, and an observer on board the rocket does the same. Here the fact that light is the signal plays a crucial role. For since light travels at the same speed relative to all inertial frames, the ship's signal does not travel any faster than the Earth's signal, but the two signals travel in tandem and reflect back from the planet together. But in the meantime the rocket ship has moved closer to the planet and so receives the return signal first. Because light's speed is the same for all inertial frames, the observer in the rocket ship cannot detect his own velocity by receiving the signal. The same is true for the Earth observer when his signal is then received. But when the rocket and the Earth observers divide the light signals' travel times in half, they will get different times for when the signals reached the planet. It might be protested that the rocket ship's measurements are distorted because it was moving toward the planet. But relativity demands that the rocket ship could with equal justice be regarded as at rest with the planet approaching it and the Earth receding away! Remember, there is no absolute space and so no absolute rest on Einstein's theory. Hence, given Einstein's definition of simultaneity, different events are calculated to be simultaneous in different inertial frames, and none of these is the preferred frame giving *the* correct

[35] Banesh Hoffmann, cited in Miller, *Special Theory of Relativity*, 192.

time. All of the various measurements in various frames are correct for each respective frame.

We now see why Einstein entitled his paper "On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies." Given the constancy of the speed of light in all inertial frames, bodies in motion will be related to each other electrodynamically in such a way that the use of electro-magnetic signals to establish synchrony relations between them will play havoc with what we normally mean by "simultaneity." What happens is that simultaneity becomes relative. Einstein writes, "Thus we see that we can attribute no *absolute* meaning to the concept of simultaneity, but that two events which, examined from a co-ordinate system, are simultaneous, can no longer be interpreted as simultaneous events when examined from a system which is in motion relatively to that system."[36] What this means is that events which are simultaneous as calculated from one inertial frame will not be simultaneous as calculated from another. An event which lies in A's future may be already present or past for B. In fact, events which are not causally connected can even be measured to occur in a different temporal order in different inertial frames.

Einsteinian time and space have many other weird properties, such as time dilation, according to which moving clocks (and all physical processes) run slower and slower as their velocity increases, and length contraction, according to which moving bodies contract in the direction of motion. These were also characteristic of Lorentz's theory, it will be recalled; but the key difference with Einstein's theory is that since Einstein denies an aether frame, these phenomena are *reciprocal*: For two relatively moving identical rockets A and B, B is shorter than A and his clock runs slower than A's relative to A's inertial frame; but A is shorter than B and his clock runs slower than B's relative to B's inertial frame. Since no inertial frame is preferred, there is no true length or true time *per se,* only lengths and times relative to different frames.

Now, as I said, the Einsteinian world is extraordinarily difficult to conceive. We intuitively think that there is a unique and universal time in which all events, however distant from one another, occur, and a unique and universal space in which all physical objects exist. But Einstein's theory tells us to substitute for absolute space an infinite number of different spaces, each associated with a different inertial frame, and for absolute time an infinite number of different times, each associated with a different inertial frame. Reality thus is radically fragmented on Einstein's view. Only observers sharing the same inertial frame (that is, at relative rest) have the

[36] Einstein, "Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies," p. 396.

same time and space. Observers in other inertial frames (that is, in relative motion) live in a different time and space. It is, I think, no exaggeration to say that on Einstein's theory relatively moving observers literally inhabit different worlds which may intersect only at a point.

What impact does STR have on the nature of divine eternity? Just this: if God is in time, then the obvious question raised by STR is: *Whose time is he in?* For according to Einstein, there is no unique, universal time and so no unique, worldwide "now." Since none of the infinitely many inertial frames is privileged or preferred, no hypothetical observer can justifiably claim that his "now" is the real or true "now." Each inertial frame has its own time and its own present moment, and there is no overarching absolute time in which all these diverse times are integrated into one. So the question is, which is God's "now?"

The defender of divine timelessness maintains that there is no acceptable answer to this question. We cannot plausibly pick out some inertial frame and identify its time as God's time because God is not a physical object in uniform motion, and so the choice of any such frame would be wholly arbitrary. Moreover, it is difficult to see how God, confined to the time of one inertial frame, could be causally sustaining events which are real relative to other inertial frames but are future or past relative to God's frame. Similarly, God's knowledge of what is happening now would be restricted to the temporal perspective of a single frame, leaving him ignorant of what is actually going on in other frames. In any case, if God were to be associated with a particular inertial frame, then surely, as God's time, the time of that frame would be privileged. It would be the equivalent of the classical aether frame. But then we are back to Lorentzian relativity, not Einsteinian relativity. So long as we maintain, with Einstein, that no frame is privileged, then we cannot identify the time of any inertial frame as God's time.

Neither can we say that God exists in the "now" associated with the time of every inertial frame, for this would obliterate the unity of God's consciousness. In the words of one philosopher of science, "God would have an infinitely split personality, each sub-personality evolving in monad-like isolation from the others" – a hypothesis in which he detects the "faint scent of polytheism."[37] In order to preserve God's consciousness as the consciousness of one being, we must not allow it to be broken and scattered among the inertial frames in the universe.

[37] Paul Fitzgerald, "Relativity Physics and the God of Process Philosophy," *Process Studies* 2, no. 4 (1972): 259, 260.

But if God's time cannot be identified with the time of a single frame or of a plurality of frames, then God must not be in time at all, that is to say, he exists timelessly. We can summarize this reasoning as follows:

1. STR is correct in its description of time.
2. If STR is correct in its description of time, then if God is temporal, he exists in either the time associated with a single inertial frame or the times associated with a plurality of inertial frames.
3. Therefore, if God is temporal, he exists in either the time associated with a single inertial frame or the times associated with a plurality of inertial frames.
4. God does not exist in either the time associated with a single inertial frame or the times associated with a plurality of inertial frames.
5. Therefore, God is not temporal.

What can be said in response to this argument? Although it may come as something of a shock to many, it seems to me that the most dubious premise of the above reasoning is premise (1). In order to understand why, let us recur to Newton's distinction between absolute and relative time. While it is easy to find statements by prominent physicists and philosophers to the effect that STR destroyed the concept of absolute time and so forces us to abandon the classical concept of time, such verdicts are almost invariably based upon a superficial understanding of the metaphysical foundations of Newton's doctrine of absolute time (and space).

We have already seen that Newtonian time is absolute both in the sense that time itself is distinct from our physical measures of time and in the sense that there is a unique, all-embracing time. But as is well-known, Newton also conceived of time as absolute in yet a third, more profound sense, namely, he held that time exists independently of any physical objects whatsoever. Usually, this is interpreted to mean that time would exist even if nothing else existed, that we can conceive of a logically possible world which is completely empty except for the container of absolute space and the flow of absolute time.

But here we must be very careful. Modern secular scholars tend frequently to forget how ardent a theist Newton was and how central a role this theism played in his metaphysical outlook. In fact, Newton makes quite clear in the *General Scholium* to the *Principia,* which he added in 1713, that absolute time and space are constituted by the divine attributes of eternity and omnipresence. He writes,

> He is eternal and infinite . . .; that is, his duration reaches from eternity to eternity; his presence from infinity to infinity . . . . He is not eternity and infinity, but eternal and infinite; he is not duration or space, but he endures and is present. He endures forever, and is everywhere present; and, by existing always and everywhere, he constitutes duration and space. Since every particle of space is *always*, and every indivisible moment of duration is *everywhere,* certainly the Maker and Lord of all things cannot be *never* and *nowhere*.[38]

Because God is eternal, there exists an everlasting duration, and because he is omnipresent, there exists an infinite space. Absolute time and space are therefore quasi-relational in that they are contingent upon the existence of God. Newton does not conceive of space or time as in any way attributes of God himself, but rather as concomitant effects of God.[39]

In Newton's view God's "now" is thus the present moment of absolute time. Since God is not "a dwarf-god" located at a particular place in space,[40] but is omnipresent, there is a worldwide moment which is absolutely present. Newton's temporal theism thus provides the foundation for absolute simultaneity. The absolute present and absolute simultaneity are features first and foremost of God's time, absolute time, and derivatively of measured or relative time.

Thus, the classical, Newtonian concept of time is firmly rooted in a theistic worldview. What Newton did not realize, nor could he have suspected, is that physical time is not only *relative,* but also *relativistic,* that the approximation of physical time to absolute time depends not merely upon the regularity of one's clock, but also upon its motion. Unless a clock were at absolute rest, it would not accurately register the passage of absolute time. Moving clocks run slowly. This truth, unknown to Newton, was finally grasped by scientists only with the advent of Relativity Theory.

Where Newton fell short, then, was not in his analysis of absolute or metaphysical time – he had theological grounds for positing such a time –, but in his incomplete understanding of relative or physical time. He assumed too readily that an ideal clock would give an accurate measure of time independently of its motion. If confronted with relativistic evidence, Newton would no doubt have welcomed this correction and seen therein no threat

[38] Newton, *"Mathematical Principles"*, II: 545.

[39] Isaac Newton, "On the Gravity and Equilibrium of Fluids," [*De gravitatione et aequipondio fluidorum*] in *Unpublished Scientific Papers of Isaac Newton,* ed. A. Rupert Hall and Marie Boas Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 132.

[40] Isaac Newton, "Place, Time, and God," in J. E. McGuire, "Newton on Place, Time, and God: An Unpublished Source," *British Journal for the History of Science* 11, no. 2 (1978): 123.

at all to his doctrine of absolute time. In short, relativity corrects Newton's concept of physical time, not his concept of absolute time.

Of course, it hardly needs to be said that there is a great deal of antipathy in modern physics and philosophy of science toward such metaphysical realities as Newtonian space and time, primarily because they are not physically detectable. But Newton would have been singularly unimpressed with this verificationist equation between physical undetectability and non-existence. The grounds for metaphysical space and time were not physical, but philosophical, or more precisely, theological. Epistemological objections fail to worry Newton because, as John Lucas nicely puts it, "He is thinking of an omniscient, omnipresent Deity whose characteristic relation with things and with space is expressed in the imperative mood."[41] Modern physical theories say nothing against the existence of such a God or the metaphysical time constituted, in Newton's thinking, by his eternity. What relativity theory did, in effect, was simply to remove God from the picture and to substitute in his place a finite observer. "Thus," according to historian of science Gerald Holton, "the *RT* [Relativity Theory] merely shifted the focus of space-time from the sensorium of Newton's God to the sensorium of Einstein's abstract *Gedankenexperimenter* – as it were, the final secularization of physics."[42] But to a man like Newton, such a secular outlook impedes rather than advances our understanding of the nature of reality.

So what justification did Einstein have for so radical a move? How did he know that absolute time and space do not exist? The answer, in a word, is verificationism. Historians of science have demonstrated convincingly that at the philosophical roots of Einstein's theory lies a verificationist epistemology, mediated to the young Einstein chiefly through the influence of Ernst Mach, which comes to expression in Einstein's analysis of the concepts of time and space.[43]

The introductory sections of the 1905 paper are predicated squarely upon verificationist assumptions. These are seen most clearly in Einstein's

[41] J. R. Lucas, *A Treatise on Time and Space* (London: Methuen, 1973), 143.

[42] Gerald Holton, "On the Origins of the Special Theory of Relativity," in Gerald Holton, *Thematic Origins of Scientific Thought: Kepler to Einstein* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 171. The sensorium was conceived to be that aspect of the mind in which mental images of physical objects are formed. Newton said that because physical objects exist in space and God is omnipresent, they literally exist in God and thus are immediately present to him. Absolute space is, as it were, God's sensorium in the sense that he has no need of mental images of things, since the things themselves are present to him. Einstein's *Gedankenexperimenter* (thought experimenter) is the hypothetical observer associated with any inertial frame, for whom time and space are purely relative quantities.

[43] See especially Gerald J. Holton, "Mach, Einstein and the Search for Reality," in *Ernst Mach: Physicist and Philosopher,* ed. Robert S. Cohen and Raymond J. Seeger (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1970), 165–199; Gerald J. Holton, "Where Is Reality? The Answers of Einstein," in *Science and Synthesis,* ed. UNESCO (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1971), 45–69; and the essays collected together in Holton, *Thematic Origins.*

operationalist re-definition of key concepts. The meaning of "time" is made to depend upon the meaning of "simultaneity," which is defined locally in terms of occurrence at the same local clock reading. In order to define a common time for spatially separated clocks, we adopt the convention that the time which light takes to travel from A to B equals the time it takes to travel from B to A – a definition which *presupposes* that absolute space does not exist. For if A and B are at relative rest but moving in tandem through absolute space, then it is not the case that a light beam will travel from A to B in the same amount of time it takes to travel from B to A, since the distances traversed will not be the same (Fig. 1).

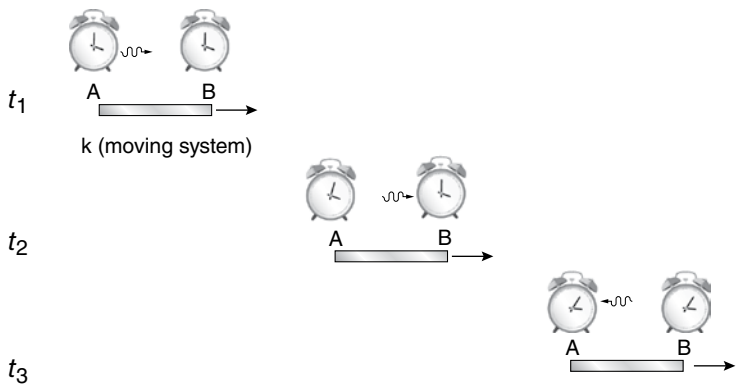

Figure 1 Clock synchronization of relatively stationary clocks in absolute motion.

That is why Einstein's theory, far from disproving the existence of absolute space, actually presupposes its non-existence. All of this is done by mere stipulation. Reality is reduced to what our measurements read; Newton's metaphysical time and space, which transcend operational definitions, are implied to be mere figments of our imagination.

How, then, shall we assess the claim that STR has eliminated absolute time and space? The first thing to be said is that the verificationism which characterized Einstein's original formulation of STR belongs essentially to the philosophical foundations of the theory. The whole theory rests upon Einstein's re-definition of simultaneity in terms of clock synchronization by light signals. But that re-definition assumes necessarily that the time which light takes to travel between two relatively stationary observers A and B is the same from A to B as from B to A in a round-trip journey. That assumption presupposes that A and B are not both in absolute motion, or in other words that neither absolute space nor a privileged inertial frame exists. The only justification for that assumption is that it is empirically

impossible to distinguish uniform motion from rest relative to such a frame, and if absolute space and absolute motion or rest are undetectable empirically, therefore they do not exist (and may even be said to be meaningless).

In a clear-sighted analysis of the epistemological foundations of STR, philosopher of science Lawrence Sklar underlines the essential role played by this verificationism:

> Certainly the original arguments in favor of the relativistic viewpoint were rife with verificationist presuppositions about meaning, etc. And despite Einstein's later disavowal of the verificationist point of view, no one to my knowledge has provided an adequate account of the foundations of relativity which isn't verificationist in essence.[44]

It would be desirable to do so, muses Sklar, but "what I don't know is . . . how to formulate a coherent underpinning for relativity which isn't verificationist . . . ."[45]

But if verificationism belongs essentially to the foundations of STR, the next thing to be said is that verificationism has proved to be completely untenable and is now obsolete. The untenability of verificationism is so universally acknowledged that it will not be necessary to rehearse the objections against it here.[46] Richard Healey observes that verificationism "has come under such sustained attack that opposition to it has become almost orthodoxy in the philosophy of science."[47] Verificationism provides no justification for thinking that Newton erred, for example, in holding that God exists in a time which exists independently of our physical measures of it and which may or may not be accurately registered by them. It matters not a whit whether we finite creatures know what time it is in God's absolute time; God knows, and that is enough.

It is difficult, therefore, to understand how many contemporary philosophers and physicists can still speak of STR's "forcing" us to abandon the

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[44] Lawrence Sklar, "Time, Reality, and Relativity," in *Reduction, Time and Reality: Studies in the Philosophy of the Natural Sciences*, ed. Richard Healey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 141.

[45] Sklar, 141.

[46] See the excellent survey in Frederick Suppe, "The Search for Philosophical Understanding of Scientific Theories," in *The Structure of Scientific Theories,* 2nd ed., ed. Frederick Suppe (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 3–118. Verificationism was far too restrictive a theory of meaning to be plausible, for it would force us to dismiss as meaningless vast tracts of human discourse, including not just metaphysical and theological statements, but also aesthetic and ethical statements, as well as many scientific statements (e.g., the postulate of the constancy of the one-way velocity of light, an unprovable assumption which lies at the heart of STR). Worse, verificationism turned out to be self-refuting. For the statement "Only sentences which can in principle be empirically verified are meaningful" is itself not an empirically verifiable sentence and so is by its own standard meaningless.

[47] Richard Healey, "Introduction," in Healey, *Reduction, Time and Reality,* vii.

classical concepts of space and time or of STR's "destruction" of Newtonian absolute time. Lawrence Sklar concludes:

> The original Einstein papers on special relativity are founded, as is well known, on a verificationist critique of earlier theories . . . . Now it might be argued that Einstein's verificationism was a misfortune, to be encountered not with a rejection of special relativity, but with an acceptance of the theory now to be understood on better epistemological grounds . . . .
>
> But I don't think a position of this kind will work in the present case. I can see no way of rejecting the old aether-compensatory theories, originally invoked to explain the Michelson–Morley results, without invoking a verificationist critique of some kind or other.[48]

With the demise of verificationism, the philosophical underpinnings of STR have collapsed. In short, there is no reason to think that premise

1. STR provides the correct description of time.

is true. I am not here endorsing Newton's view on divine eternity; but I am saying that the theologian who, like Newton, believes God to be temporal need not feel threatened by STR because STR's claim that absolute time does not exist is founded essentially upon a defunct and untenable epistemology.

If we do suppose that God is in time, how then should we understand STR? Henri Poincaré, the great French mathematician and precursor of STR, helped to point the way. In a fascinating passage in his essay "The Measure of Time," Poincaré briefly entertains the hypothesis of "an infinite intelligence" and considers the implications of such a hypothesis. Poincaré is reflecting on the problem of how we can apply one and the same measure of time to spatially distant events. What does it mean, for example, to say that two thoughts in two people's minds occur simultaneously? Or what does it mean to say that a supernova occurred before Columbus saw the New World? Like a good verificationist, Poincaré says, "All these affirmations have by themselves no meaning."[49] Then he remarks,

> We should first ask ourselves how one could have had the idea of putting into the same frame so many worlds impenetrable to one another. We should like to represent to ourselves the external universe, and only by so doing could we feel that we understood it. We know we can never attain

[48] Sklar, "Time, Reality and Relativity," 132.

[49] Henri Poincaré, "The Measure of Time," in *The Foundations of Science,* trans. George Bruce Halsted (New York: The Science Press,: 1913; repr., Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1982), 228.

> this representation: our weakness is too great. But at least we desire the ability to conceive an infinite intelligence for which this representation could be possible, a sort of great consciousness which should see all, and which should classify all *in its time,* as we classify, *in our time,* the little we see.
>
> This hypothesis is indeed crude and incomplete, because this supreme intelligence would be only a demigod; infinite in one sense, it would be limited in another, since it would have only an imperfect recollection of the past; it could have no other, since otherwise all recollections would be equally present to it and for it there would be no time. And yet when we speak of time, for all which happens outside of us, do we not unconsciously adopt this hypothesis; do we not put ourselves in the place of this imperfect God; and do not even the atheists put themselves in the place where God would be if he existed?
>
> What I have just said shows us, perhaps, why we have tried to put all physical phenomena into the same frame. But that cannot pass for a definition of simultaneity, since this hypothetical intelligence, even if it existed, would be for us impenetrable. It is therefore necessary to seek something else.[50]

Poincaré here suggests that, in considering the notion of simultaneity, we instinctively put ourselves in the place of God and classify events as past, present, or future according to his time. Poincaré does not deny that from God's perspective there would exist relations of absolute simultaneity. But he rejects the hypothesis as yielding a definition of simultaneity because we could not know such relations; such knowledge would remain the exclusive possession of God himself.

Clearly, Poincaré's misgivings are relevant to a definition of simultaneity only if one is presupposing some sort of verificationist theory of meaning, as he undoubtedly was. The fact remains that God knows the absolute simultaneity of events even if we grope in total darkness. Nor need we be concerned with Poincaré's argument that such an infinite intelligence would be a mere demigod, since there is no reason to think that a temporal being cannot have a perfect recollection of the past. There is no conceptual difficulty in the idea of a being which knows all past-tense truths. His knowledge would be constantly changing, as more and more events become past. But at each successive moment he could know every past-tense truth that there is at that moment. Hence, it does not follow that if God is temporal, he cannot have perfect recollection of the past.

[50] Poincaré, 228–229.

Poincaré's hypothesis suggests, therefore, that if God is temporal, his present is constitutive of relations of absolute simultaneity.[51] On this view J. N. Findlay was wrong when he said, "the influence which harmonizes and connects all the world-lines is not God, not any featureless, inert, medium, but that living, active interchange called . . . Light, offspring of Heaven firstborn."[52] On the contrary, the use of light signals to establish clock synchrony would be a convention which finite and ignorant creatures have been obliged to adopt, but the living and active God, who knows all, would not be so dependent. Inviting us to "imagine a superhuman observer – a god – who is not bound by the limitations of the maximum velocity of light," Milton Munitz notes:

> Such an observer could survey in a single instant the entire domain of galaxies that have already come into existence. His survey would not have to depend on the finite velocity of light. It would not betray any restriction in information of the kind that results from the delayed time it takes to bring information about the domain of galaxies to an ordinary human observer situated in the universe, and who is therefore bound by the mechanisms and processes of signal transmission. The entire domain of galaxies would be seen instantaneously by this privileged superhuman observer. His observational survey of all galaxies would yield what Milne calls a 'world map.'[53]

In God's temporal experience, there would be a moment which would be present in absolute time, whether or not it were registered by any clock time. He would know, without any dependence on clock synchronization procedures or any physical operations at all, which events were simultaneously present in absolute time. He would know this simply in virtue of his knowing at every such moment the unique collection of present-tense truths at that moment, without any need of physical observation of the universe.

So what would become of STR if God is in time? From what has been said, God's existence in time would imply that Lorentz, rather than Einstein,

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[51] Cf. Lorentz's illustration in a letter to Einstein in January of 1915 in response to the latter's paper "The Formal Foundations of the General Theory of Relativity." In a passage redolent of the *General Scholium* and *Opticks* of Newton, Lorentz broached considerations whereby "I cross the borderland of physics":

> "A 'World Spirit' who, not being bound to a specific place, permeated the entire system under consideration or 'in whom' this system existed and who could 'feel' immediately all events would naturally distinguish at once one of the systems *U, U′,* etc. above the others" (H. A. Lorentz to A. Einstein, January, 1915, Boerhaave Museum, cited in József Illy, "Einstein Teaches Lorentz, Lorentz Teaches Einstein. Their collaboration in General Relativity, 1913–1920," *Archive for History of Exact Sciences* 39, no. 3 [1989]: 274).

Such a being, says Lorentz, could "directly verify simultaneity."

[52] J. N. Findlay, "Time and Eternity," *Review of Metaphysics* 32, no. 1 (1978): 6–7.

[53] Milton K. Munitz, *Cosmic Understanding* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 157.

had the correct interpretation of Relativity Theory. That is to say, Einstein's clock synchronization procedure would be valid only in the preferred (absolute) reference frame, and measuring rods would contract and clocks slow down in the customary special relativistic way when in motion with respect to the preferred frame. Such an interpretation would be implied by divine temporality, for God in the "now" of absolute time would know which events in the universe are now being created by him and are therefore absolutely simultaneous with one another and with his "now." This startling conclusion shows that Newton's theistic hypothesis is not some idle speculation but has important implications for our understanding of how the world is and for the assessment of rival scientific theories.

Lorentzian relativity is admitted on all sides to be empirically equivalent to Einsteinian relativity, and there are even indications on the cutting edge of contemporary physics that a Lorentzian view may be preferable in light of recent discoveries. In fact, due to developments in quantum physics, there has been what one participant in the debate has called "a sea change" in the attitude of the physics community toward Lorentzian relativity.[54]

For example, the best explanation of the experimental evidence concerning what is called Bell's Theorem seems to be that relations of absolute simultaneity do exist. By way of background: Between 1927 and 1935 Einstein pursued a running argument with the Danish physicist Niels Bohr, the father of quantum physics. Bohr believed that elementary particles do not have intrinsic, determinate properties like momentum and location. Such properties are possessed only in relation to some measuring apparatus. Retorting that "God does not play dice," Einstein repeatedly sought to concoct thought experiments which would show that, contrary to Bohr, the sub-atomic world is not characterized by indeterminacy. The most celebrated of these was a thought experiment jointly proposed with Boris Podolsky and Nathan Rosen in 1935, which thus came to be known as

[54] John Kennedy in a paper delivered to the American Philosophical Association, Central Division Meeting, Pittsburgh, PA, April 23–26, 1997. Compare the passing remark of Balashov, "the idea of restoring absolute simultaneity no longer has a distinctively pseudo-scientific flavor it has had until very recently" (Yuri Balashov, "Enduring and Perduring Objects in Minkowski Space-Time," *Philosophical Studies* 99 [2000]: 129–166). More recently Brian Pitts notes that as a result of Petr Hořava's 2009 formulation of a quantum mechanical theory featuring fundamental relations of absolute simultaneity, the possibility that relativity may someday fall in favor of absolute simultaneity is "less extravagant after 2009 than one might have thought"; indeed, non-relativistic theories have seen "an explosion of attention since 2009 in fundamental physics" (J. Brian Pitts, "Conservation Laws and the Philosophy of Mind: Opening the Black Box, Finding a Mirror," *Philosophia* 48 [2020]: 677, 691). In Hořava's formulation of quantum mechanics, "the fundamental description of the theory is deeply nonrelativistic. At short distances, the spacetime manifold is equipped with an extra structure, of a fixed codimension-one foliation by slices of constant time. This preferred foliation of spacetime defines a global causal structure [and] leads to an invariant notion of time" (Petr Hořava, "Quantum Gravity at a Lifshitz Point," *Physical Review D* 79, no. 8 (April 6, 2009): 084008).

the EPR experiment.[55] The idea was to split a beam of light into two particles traveling in opposite directions. If we measure the velocity of one of the particles, quantum physics requires that the other particle instantaneously take on a similar value. Since no causal influence can travel faster than the speed of light, there is no way in which our measuring one particle could influence the other particle. Thus, the particles must possess an intrinsic, determinate velocity even before they are measured – in contradiction to Bohr's claim. In 1964 John Bell showed that if Einstein were right, then such an experiment would have testable consequences which disagree with the predictions made by quantum theory.[56] Tests were run, and, lo and behold, the predictions of quantum physics were fully vindicated.

The implications were enormous. In order to explain the results, one must either postulate faster-than-light causal influences between the particles or hold that the particles are somehow non-causally correlated so that both particles instantaneously take on certain determinate properties. In either case, the relativity of simultaneity posited by STR will have to be given up. Bell himself, pondering the implications of the experimental data, mused,

> I think it's a deep dilemma, and the resolution of it will not be trivial; it will require a substantial change in the way we look at things. But I would say that the cheapest resolution is something like going back to relativity as it was before Einstein, when people like Lorentz and Poincaré thought that there was an aether – a preferred frame of reference – but that our measuring instruments were distorted by motion in such a way that we could not detect motion through the aether . . . . that is certainly the cheapest solution. Behind the apparent Lorentz invariance of the phenomena, there is a deeper level which is not Lorentz invariant . . . . what is not sufficiently emphasized in textbooks, in my opinion, is that the pre-Einstein position of Lorentz and Poincaré, Larmor and Fitzgerald was perfectly coherent, and is not inconsistent with relativity theory. The idea that there is an aether, and these Fitzgerald contractions and Larmor dilations occur, and that as a result the instruments do not detect motion through the aether – that is a perfectly coherent point of view . . . . The reason I want to go back to the idea of an aether here is because in these EPR experiments there is the suggestion that behind the scenes something is going faster than light. Now, if all Lorentz frames are

[55] Albert Einstein, Boris Podolsky, and Nathan Rosen, "Can Quantum-Mechanical Description of Physical Reality Be Considered Complete?," in *Quantum Theory and Measurement,* ed. John Archibald Wheeler and Wojciech Hubert Zurek (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 138.

[56] John S. Bell, "On the Einstein Podolsky Rosen Paradox," in Wheeler and Zurek, *Quantum Theory and Measurement,* 403–408.

> equivalent, that also means that things can go backward in time . . . . [this] introduces great problems, paradoxes of causality and so on. And so it's precisely to avoid these that I want to say there is a real causal sequence which is defined in the aether.[57]

In light of the above, it is little wonder that the great philosopher of science Karl Popper considered the experiments run on Bell's Theorem as the first crucial experiments between Lorentz's and Einstein's interpretations of relativity. He remarks,

> The reason for this assertion is that the mere existence of an infinite velocity entails that of an absolute simultaneity and thereby of an absolute space. Whether or not an infinite velocity can be attained *in the transmission of signals* is irrelevant for this argument: the one inertial system for which Einsteinian simultaneity coincides with absolute simultaneity . . . would be the system at absolute rest – whether or not this system at absolute rest can be experimentally identified.[58]

If there is action at a distance, advises Popper, "it would mean that we have to give up Einstein's interpretation of special relativity and return to Lorentz's interpretation and with it to Newton's absolute space and time."[59] Popper goes on to observe that none of the mathematical formalism of STR need be given up, but only Einstein's interpretation of it. "If we now have theoretical reasons from quantum theory for introducing absolute simultaneity, then we would have to go back to Lorentz's interpretation."[60]

Moreover, in a truly astonishing development in twentieth century cosmology, we may even have a good idea as to what is the preferred reference frame. For the cosmic microwave background radiation first predicted by George Gamow and then discovered in 1965 by A. A. Penzias and R. W. Wilson is at rest with respect to the expanding space of Big Bang cosmogony. It is therefore a sort of aether, serving to distinguish a

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[57] "John Bell," in *The Ghost in the Atom: A Discussion of the Mysteries of Quantum Physics*, ed. P. C. W. Davies and J. R. Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 48–50. Even if one does not postulate faster-than-light causal influences, the fact remains that the indeterminacy in each particle collapses instantly and simultaneously, which cannot be accounted for within an Einsteinian interpretation of STR, as is explained by Tim Maudlin, *Quantum Non-locality and Relativity: Metaphysical Intimations of Modern Physics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

[58] Karl Popper, "A Critical Note on the Greatest Days of Quantum Theory," in *Quantum, Space and Time—The Quest Continues,* ed. Asim O. Barut, Alwyn van der Merwe, and Jean-Pierre Vigier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 54.

[59] Karl Popper, *Quantum Theory and the Schism in Physics,* ed. W. W. Bartley III (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982), 29.

[60] Popper, 30.

universal rest frame.[61] Tests have even detected the Earth's motion relative to this background radiation, thus fulfilling the dream of nineteenth century physics of measuring the aether wind![62] What nineteenth century physics could not detect using visible light radiation, twentieth century physics discovered using microwave radiation. Philosopher of science James Cushing connects the universal preferred frame defined by the microwave background radiation with the unique frame in which absolute simultaneity is required by the experimental results of Bell's Theorem, proclaiming, "Today . . . the aether has re-emerged through quantum phenomena!"[63] One can only speculate whether, had these facts been known in 1905, Einstein would have ever suggested that absolute space and time do not exist.

Again, none of this proves that Newton was right in thinking that God is in time; but it does undercut the claim that STR has proven Newton to be wrong. The defender of divine temporality can plausibly reject the first premise of the argument for divine timelessness based on the Special Theory of Relativity.

Now some people might lack the temerity to challenge the conventional wisdom concerning the physical interpretation of Special Relativity. Never mind; for the second premise of the argument under consideration

> 2. If STR is correct in its description of time, then if God is temporal, he exists in either the time associated with a single inertial frame or the times associated with a plurality of inertial frames.

is demonstrably false. The difficulty with this premise is that it fails to take into account the fact that STR is a *restricted* theory of relativity and therefore is correct only within prescribed limits. It is a theory which deals with uniform motion only. The analysis of non-uniform motion, such as acceleration and rotation, is provided by the General Theory of Relativity (GTR). STR cannot therefore be expected to give us the final word about the nature of time and space; indeed, within the context of GTR a new and important conception of time emerges.

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[61] Michael Heller, Zbigniew Klimek, and Konrad Rudnicki, "Observational Foundations for Assumptions in Cosmology," in *Confrontation of Cosmological Theories with Observational Data,* ed. M. S. Longair (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1974), 4. Kanitscheider remarks, "The cosmic background radiation thereby furnishes a reference frame, relative to which it is meaningful to speak of an *absolute* motion" (Bernulf Kanitscheider, *Kosmologie: Geschichte und Systematik in philosophischer Perspektive* [Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1984], 256).

[62] G. F. Smoot, M. V. Gorenstein, and R. A. Muller, "Detection of Anisotropy in the Cosmic Blackbody Radiation," *Physical Review Letters* 39 (1977): 899.

[63] James T. Cushing, "What Measurement Problem?," in *Perspectives on Quantum Reality*, ed. Rob Clifton (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996), 75. So also Popper, *Quantum Theory,* 30.

Let us therefore offer a brief word of explanation of GTR. As in Newtonian physics, so in STR accelerated or rotational motion is not relative, but absolute. If a reference frame is accelerating, rather than moving uniformly, there are discernible effects within the frame. For example, a space traveler feels himself pressed back into his seat as his rocket accelerates; by the same token, deceleration causes him to pitch forward in his seat. Troubled by the non-equivalence of inertial and non-inertial frames, Einstein endeavored in his GTR to enunciate a General Principle of Relativity which would serve to render physically equivalent all inertial and non-inertial frames alike. In his article "The Foundations of General Relativity Theory" (1915), he boasted that his theory "takes away from space and time the last remnant of physical objectivity."[64] It was, in effect, intended to be the final destruction of Newton's absolute space and time.

What Einstein saw was that the effects of acceleration were exactly equivalent to the effects of gravitation. A space traveler in a capsule suddenly pressed back into his seat would not know the difference between his rocket's accelerating or an increase in the force of gravity behind him. (Hence, today we often speak of an astronaut's feeling a force of several Gs [several times the normal force of gravity] as his rocket blasts off.) Perhaps, then, gravity and acceleration could be regarded as equivalent.

In order to carry out this idea, Einstein proposed that gravity be analyzed, not as a force that somehow affects objects at a distance, but rather as the curvature of space-time. A physical object bends or curves space-time, like a heavy ball resting on a cushion, so that objects which appear to be under another object's gravitational influence are not in fact being *pulled* toward the more massive object, but are rather, to put it crudely, coasting downhill toward it. A two-dimensional analogy would be a taught rubber sheet with balls of various mass placed on the sheet, causing depressions around them of various depths. If a ball bearing were rolled across the sheet and encountered a depression, it would be deflected from its path and maybe even "pulled" into the object causing the depression. Although the three-dimensional analogue of this is not visualizable, Einstein worked out an incredibly sophisticated mathematical theory for it which came to replace Newton's theory of gravitation.

In fact, however, Einstein was only partially successful in achieving his aims. He did not succeed in enunciating a tenable General Principle of Relativity, nor was he able to show the physical equivalence of all reference

[64] A. Einstein, "The Foundations of General Relativity Theory," in *General Theory of Relativity*, ed. C. W. Kilmister (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1973), 148.

frames.[65] Acceleration and rotation are still distinguishable from uniform motion in the context of GTR. He did succeed in crafting a revolutionary and elegant theory of gravitation, which has been widely hailed as his greatest intellectual achievement. The so-called General Theory of Relativity is thus something of a misnomer: it is really a theory of gravitation and not an extension of the Special Theory of Relativity from inertial reference frames to all reference frames.

It might appear, therefore, that GTR has nothing more to contribute to our understanding of time than STR. The two theories appear to differ simply over whether space-time is curved; if one adds a condition of flatness of space-time to GTR, then STR results. Such a conclusion would be mistaken, however. For GTR serves to introduce into Relativity Theory a cosmic perspective, enabling us to craft cosmological models of the universe governed by the gravitational field equations of GTR. Within the context of such cosmological models, the issue of time resurfaces dramatically.

Einstein himself proposed the first GTR-based cosmological model in his paper, "Cosmological Considerations on the General Theory of Relativity" in 1917.[66] The model describes a universe whose temporal dimension is infinite, but whose spatial dimensions are finite and invariable. Thus, 4-dimensional space-time has the form of a cylinder, time represented by the length of the cylinder and space by its cross-sections. Bernulf Kanitscheider draws our attention to the time co-ordinate which shows up in Einstein's model:

> It represents in a certain sense the restoration of the universal time which was destroyed by STR. In the static world there is a global reference frame, relative to which the whole of cosmic matter finds itself at rest. All cosmological parameters are independent of time. In the rest frame of cosmic matter space and time are separated. For fundamental observers at rest, all clocks can be synchronized and a worldwide simultaneity can be defined in this cosmic frame.[67]

Thus, cosmological considerations prompt the conception of a cosmic time which measures the duration of the universe as a whole.

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[65] See Michael Friedman, *Foundations of Space-Time Theories: Relativistic Physics and Philosophy of Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 204–215; also Hermann Bondi, "Is 'General Relativity' Necessary for Einstein's Theory of Gravitation?," in *Relativity, Quanta, and Cosmology in the Development of the Scientific Thought of Albert Einstein,* ed. Francesco de Finis (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1979), 1: 179–186.

[66] A. Einstein, "Cosmological Considerations on the General Theory of Relativity," in *The Principle of Relativity,* ed. H. A. Lorentz et al., trans. W. Perrett and G. B. Jeffery (New York: Dover Publications, 1952), 177–188.

[67] Kanitscheider, *Kosmologie*, 155. See also G. J. Whitrow, *The Natural Philosophy of Time,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 283–284.

Nor is this cosmic time limited to Einstein's model of a static universe. Models of an expanding universe, which trace their origin to Willem de Sitter's 1917 model,[68] may also involve a cosmic time. All contemporary expansion models derive from Russian physicist Alexander Friedman's 1922 model of an expanding, material universe characterized by ideal homogeneity and uniformity.[69] Several features of the cosmic time in Friedman models merit comment. First, although one may slice space-time into various spatial cross-sections wholly arbitrarily, certain space-times have natural symmetries that guide the construction of cosmic time.[70] GTR does not itself mandate any formula for how to slice up space-time; it has no inherent "layers." Theoretically, then, one may slice it up at one's whim. Nevertheless, certain models of space-time, like the Friedman model, have a dynamical, evolving spatial geometry, and in order to ensure a smooth development of this geometry, it will be necessary to construct a cosmic time parameter based on a preferred slicing of space-time.

Now as a parameter, cosmic time measures the duration of the universe as a whole in an observer-independent way; that is to say, the lapse of cosmic time is the same for all observers. Nevertheless, cosmic time is related to the local times of a special group of observers called "fundamental observers." These are hypothetical observers who are at rest with respect to the expansion of space itself. It is important to realize that despite potentially misleading expressions like "the Big Bang," the expansion of the universe should not be thought of as the explosion of material into a previously existing empty space. Rather in Friedman models it is space itself which is expanding, and the galaxies are fixed in space and are simply "riding along" with the expanding space. The easiest way to envision this is to imagine a balloon with buttons glued to its surface. As one blows up the balloon, the buttons, though stuck in place, recede from one another because the balloon itself is expanding. The surface of the balloon is the two-dimensional analogue to space, and the buttons are like the galaxies. As space expands the galaxies recede from one another, even though they are fixed in space. Now fundamental observers are hypothetical observers associated with the galaxies. As time goes on and the expansion of space proceeds, each fundamental observer remains in the same place, though his spatial separation from fellow fundamental observers increases. Cosmic time relates to these observers in that their local times all coincide with

[68] Willem de Sitter, "On the Relativity of Inertia: Remarks Concerning Einstein's Latest Hypothesis," in *Proceedings of the Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen* 19 (1917): 1217–1225.
[69] A. Friedman, "Über die Krümmung des Raumes," *Zeitschrift für Physik* 10 (1922): 377–386.
[70] See Charles W. Misner, Kip S. Thorne, and John Archibald Wheeler, *Gravitation* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1973), 713–714; Kanitscheider, *Kosmologie*, 182–197.

cosmic time in their vicinity. Because of their mutual recession, the class of fundamental observers do not serve to define a global inertial frame, technically speaking, even though all of them are at rest. But since each fundamental observer is at rest with respect to space, the events which each one calculates to be simultaneous will coincide locally with the events which are simultaneous in cosmic time. What this implies is that, contrary to premise (2), it does not follow from the correctness of STR that if God is in time, then he is in the time of one or more inertial frames.[71] For if God exists in cosmic time, there is no universal inertial frame with which he can be associated.

Thus, on a cosmic scale, we seem to have that universality of time and absolute simultaneity of events which the Special Theory had denied. G. J. Whitrow asserts, "in a universe that is characterized by the existence of a cosmic time, relativity is reduced to a local phenomenon, since this time is world-wide and independent of the observer."[72] Based on a cosmological, rather than a local, perspective, cosmic time serves to restore to us our intuitive notions of universal time and absolute simultaneity which STR denied.

The question, then, becomes an empirical one: does cosmic time exist? Do we live in a Friedman universe? The evidence strongly suggests that we do. According to the British Astronomer Royal Sir Martin Rees, "The most remarkable outcome of 50 years of observational cosmology has been the realization that the universe is more isotropic and uniform than the pioneer theorists of the 1920's would ever have suspected."[73] The findings of the COBE satellite, which measured the uniformity of the cosmic background radiation to one part in 100,000, have dramatically underscored this conclusion. "We have strong evidence that the universe as a whole is predominantly homogeneous and isotropic," states Whitrow, "and this conclusion . . . is a strong argument for the existence of cosmic time."[74] Thus, far from "taking away from space and time the last remnant of physical objectivity," as Einstein thought at first, GTR through its cosmological applications appears to give back what STR had removed.

The defender of divine temporality may accordingly hold that God exists in cosmic time. Already in 1920, on the basis of Einstein and de Sitter's

[71] In the sense that God exists in the time of the inertial frame of each fundamental observer, there is no objection, since all their local times fuse into one cosmic time.
[72] Whitrow, *Natural Philosophy of Time,* 371; cf. 302.
[73] Martin J. Rees, "The Size and Shape of the Universe," in *Some Strangeness in the Proportion: A Centennial Symposium to Celebrate the Achievements of Albert Einstein,* ed. Harry Woolf (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1980), 293. *Isotropy* is the property of being the same in all directions.
[74] Whitrow, *Natural Philosophy of Time,* 307.

cosmological models, Eddington hinted at a theological interpretation of cosmic time:

> In the first place, absolute space and time are restored for phenomena on a cosmical scale . . . . The world taken as a whole has one direction in which it is not curved; that direction gives a kind of absolute time distinct from space. Relativity is reduced to a local phenomenon; and although this is quite sufficient for the theory hitherto described, we are inclined to look on the limitation rather grudgingly. But we have already urged that the relativity theory is not concerned to deny the possibility of an absolute time, but to deny that it is concerned in any experimental knowledge yet found; and it need not perturb us if the conception of absolute time turns up in a new form in a theory of phenomena on a cosmical scale, as to which no experimental knowledge is yet available. Just as each limited observer has his own particular separation of space and time, so a being co-extensive with the world might well have a special separation of space and time natural to him. It is the time for this being that is here dignified by the title 'absolute.'[75]

Notice that Eddington is quite willing to call cosmic time "absolute" in view of its independence from space, that is to say, its status as a parameter. Relativistic time is only a local time, whereas cosmic time, being nonlocal, is the true time. Although in 1920 there was no empirical evidence for cosmic time, within a few short years astronomical evidence confirmed the prediction of the Friedman model of a universal expansion and, hence, of cosmic time. This cosmic time would, says Eddington, be the time of an omnipresent being. Cosmic time is not merely the "fusion" of all the local times recorded by the separate fundamental observers, but, even *more* fundamentally, it is the time which measures the duration of the universe. As the measure of the proper time of the universe, cosmic time also measures the duration of and lapse of time for a temporal being co-extensive with the world. For Eddington, it is the time of this being that deserves to be called "absolute."

Such an affirmation will be typically met with passionate disclamations. Any equivalence of cosmic time with Newton's absolute time is usually vigorously repudiated by relativistic scientists. But here one must not confuse the various senses of "absolute." Eddington is not claiming that cosmic time is metaphysically necessary or independent of physical measures. Rather he is saying that cosmic time is not tied to inertial frames and so

[75] Arthur Eddington, *Space, Time and Gravitation: An Outline of the General Relativity Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 168.

is privileged. One of the most intriguing indications that cosmic time does represent the physical equivalent of Newton's absolute time is the surprising demonstration by E. A. Milne and W. H. McCrea that all the results of GTR-based, Friedman cosmology can be recovered by Newtonian physics and in a way that is simpler than Einstein's cumbersome mathematics![76] Schücking points out that the main asset of the Milne-McCrea formulation was that it gave exactly the same equations for the time development of the universe as the Friedman theory and yet allowed a much simpler derivation.[77] Thus, Bondi likens cosmic time to Newton's uniform, omnipresent, and even-flowing time, which enables all observers to synchronize their clocks to a single time.[78] Kerszberg concludes, "On the whole, the equivalence between Newtonian and relativistic cosmology only reinforces the conviction that cosmic time is indeed a necessary ingredient in the formalisation of a relativistic cosmology, however alien to general relativity and congenial to Newton's theory the notion of universal synchronisation might seem."[79]

Now at this point the advocate of divine timelessness may think that he has just been inadvertently delivered the trump card. For cosmic time had a beginning; the Big Bang event represents not just the origin of all the matter and energy in the universe, but the origin of space-time itself. There is no moment "before" the Big Bang, since time originated at the Big Bang. So if God is temporal and time had a beginning, God must have had a beginning. But obviously, God did not come into existence with the Big Bang, or at any other time, for his existence is beginningless and endless. God must therefore transcend time and is thus timeless.

The Newtonian will be unfazed by this objection, however, for he may plausibly construe cosmic time as but an empirical measure of God's time since the moment of creation. Newton himself implies such an interpretation when he writes:

> Absolute time, in astronomy, is distinguished from relative [time], by the equation or correction of the apparent time. For the natural days are truly unequal, though they are commonly considered as equal, and used for a measure of time; astronomers correct this inequality that they may measure the celestial motions by a more accurate time. It may be, that there is no such thing as an equable motion, whereby time may be accurately

[76] E. A. Milne, *Relativity, Gravitation and World-Structure* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935); E. A. Milne, "A Newtonian Expanding Universe," *Quarterly Journal of Mathematics* 5 (1934): 64–72; W. H. McCrea, "On the Significance of Newtonian Cosmology," *Astronomical Journal* 60 (1955): 271–274.
[77] E. L. Schücking, "Newtonian Cosmology," *Texas Quarterly* 10 (1967): 274.
[78] Hermann Bondi, *Cosmology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 70–71.
[79] Pierre Kerszberg, "On the Alleged Equivalence between Newtonian and Relativistic Cosmology," *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 38, no. 3 (1987): 376.

> measured. All motions may be accelerated and retarded, but the flowing of absolute time is not liable to any change. The duration or perseverance of the existence of things remains the same, whether the motions are swift or slow, or none at all: and therefore this duration ought to be distinguished from what are only sensible measures thereof; and from which we deduce it, by means of the astronomical equation.[80]

Cosmic time provides an approximate measure of God's absolute time and of his co-existence with the universe since the moment of creation. While this empirical measure of time had a beginning in the Big Bang, time itself, on Newton's view, did not. Thus God existed literally before the Big Bang event in absolute time. Newton believed that the "flow" of absolute time would exist even in the utter absence of events – as he says, "whether the motions are swift or slow, or none at all." For time, on his view, is the immediate effect of God's merely existing. Thus, even if there were no events prior to creation, time would still exist as the duration of God's being.

It ought to be noted, however, that the view that time existed prior to creation does not depend upon adopting Newton's belief that time can exist in the absence of events. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz opposed Newton in this regard, maintaining that time is a relation between events and so could not exist if there were no events. Leibniz therefore held that time began at the moment of creation with the occurrence of the first event. But even granted a Leibnizian relational view of time, it can still make sense to talk about time prior to creation. For the events which serve to generate time need not be physical events; a sequence of mental events would suffice. Suppose, for example, that God were to be counting down toward the moment of creation: ". . ., −3, −2, −1. Let there be light!" In such a case the mental events of counting would generate a temporal succession of moments. Or God could have created angelic beings prior to the Big Bang which were undergoing a succession of mental states. Thus, whether one adopts a Newtonian (substantival) or Leibnizian (relational) view of time, it makes sense to talk about time prior to the inception of physical, cosmic time, which is but an empirical measure of time itself. Indeed, I take the coherence of this thought experiment to be a knock-down argument that STR, or any other scientific theory, does not furnish a correct description of time itself. At best scientific accounts describe our physical *measures* of time, but not time *itself*.

In conclusion, Relativity Theory does not provide good grounds for thinking that God is timeless. The Einsteinian interpretation of STR is based

[80] Newton, *"Mathematical Principles"*, I: 7–8.

essentially upon an untenable and obsolete verificationist epistemology and so cannot force abandonment of the classical concept of time. Moreover, GTR in its cosmological application furnishes us with a cosmic time parameter which may be plausibly interpreted as the appropriate measure of God's time since the moment of creation. The past finitude of cosmic time does not imply the finitude of God's time, for whether one adopts a substantival or relational view of time, it is coherent to speak of God's existing temporally prior to the creation of the universe and the beginning of cosmic time.

7.2.4 Incompleteness of Temporal Life

An important argument from perfect being theology in favor of divine timelessness rests on the claim that the fleeting nature of temporal life is incompatible with the life of a most perfect being like God. In defense of this argument, Brian Leftow draws upon Boethius' characterization of eternity as *complete possession all at once of interminable life* in order to argue for the defectiveness of temporal existence.[81] Leftow points out that a temporal being is unable to enjoy what is past or future for it. The past is gone forever, and the future is yet to come. The passage of time thus renders it impossible for any temporal being to possess all its life at once. Even God, if he is temporal, cannot reclaim the past. Leftow emphasizes that even perfect memory cannot substitute for reality: "the past itself is *lost,* and no memory, however complete, can take its place – for confirmation, ask a widower if his grief would be abated were his memory of his wife enhanced in vividness and detail."[82] By contrast a timeless God lives all his life at once because he literally has no past or future and so suffers no loss. Therefore, since God is the most perfect being, he is timeless.

We can formulate this argument as follows:

1. God is a perfect being.
2. A perfect being has the most perfect mode of existence.
3. Temporal existence is a less perfect mode of existence than timeless existence.
4. Therefore, God has the most perfect mode of existence.
5. Therefore, God has a timeless mode of existence.

Here I think we have an argument for divine timelessness which is really promising. The premises of the argument rest on very powerful intuitions

[81] Leftow, *Time and Eternity,* 278.
[82] Leftow, 278.

about the irretrievable loss that arises through the experience of temporal passage, a loss which intuitively should not characterize the experience of a perfect being. Time has a savage way of gnawing away at life, leaving it transitory and incomplete, so that life in its fullness can never be enjoyed by any temporal being.

The force of these considerations is such that Stump and Kretzmann, whose 1981 article "Eternity" in the *Journal of Philosophy* sparked a revival of interest in the doctrine of divine timelessness, have rested their case for God's atemporality solely on the shoulders of this argument. They comment,

> No life . . . that is imperfect in its being possessed with the radical incompleteness entailed by temporal existence could be the mode of existence of an absolutely perfect being. A perfectly possessed life must be devoid of any past, which would be no longer possessed, and of any future, which would be not yet possessed. The existence of an absolutely perfect being must be an indivisibly persistent present actuality.[83]

Their claim that the life of a most perfect being must be an indivisible actuality has, I think, a good deal of plausibility.

Some philosophers of time might try to avert the force of this argument by adopting a view of time according to which things and events do not in fact come to be or pass away. According to a tenseless or "static" view of time, the past and future are just as real as the present. The difference between past, present, and future is usually explained as just a subjective illusion of human consciousness. For the people located in 1868, for example, the events of 1868 are present, and we are future; by the same token, for the people living in 2075 it is the events of 2075 which are present, and we are past. Time is akin to a spatial line, and all the points of the line are equally real. On such a view of time, if something has a finite lifetime, it does not come into being at a certain point and go out of being at a later point. Rather it just exists at those two points and all the points in between. The longer a thing's temporal extension, the longer its lifetime. If the temporal extensions of two persons overlap, then they will regard themselves as both present during that period of overlap. If one has a longer timeline than the other, then the person with the longer timeline will regard the other as at some point no longer present; but, say the partisans of tenseless time, if that person is philosophically informed, he will not regard his fellow as non-existent. Albert Einstein, who came to adopt this view of time, took

[83] Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Prophecy, Past Truth, and Eternity," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 395; cf. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Eternity, Awareness, and Action," *Faith and Philosophy* 9, no. 4 (1992): 463.

this idea so seriously that when his life-long friend Michael Besso died he tried to comfort Besso's surviving son and sister by writing, "This signifies nothing. For us believing physicists the distinction between past, present, and future is only an illusion, even if a stubborn one."[84] On this view of time no temporal being ever really loses its past or has not yet acquired its future. Just as things are extended in space, so they are also extended in time. A temporal being has nothing to lose and nothing to gain; it just exists tenselessly at its temporal locations. Thus, a temporal God would exist at all temporal locations without beginning or end to his temporal extension. On this view of time God does not lose or acquire portions of his life.

The problem with this escape route is that it fails to appreciate that the argument is based on the *experience* of temporal passage, rather than on the objective reality of temporal passage itself.[85] The flow of time is an ineradicable part of the experience of a temporal person. Even if the future never becomes and the past is never really lost, the fact remains that for a temporal being the past is lost *to him* and the future is not accessible *to him*. As H. G. Wells' celebrated time traveler, who believed that time was a fourth dimension of space, remarked, "Our mental existences, which are immaterial and have no dimensions, are passing along the Time-Dimension with a uniform velocity from the cradle to the grave."[86] Even if the cradle and the grave are just as real as the present, we still find ourselves experientially at some point in between, and events which are located at times earlier than that point are irretrievably lost to us, and events later than that point can only be anticipated. For this reason a theory of tenseless time does nothing to alleviate the loss occasioned by our experience of temporal becoming. I dare say that the bereaved find little comfort in the thought that a deceased loved one exists tenselessly at earlier temporal co-ordinates than those which they occupy. Time's tooth gnaws away at our experience of life regardless of the tenseless existence of all events making up one's life. For this reason, it would be futile to attempt to elude the force of this argument by postulating a temporal deity in a tenseless time.

Other philosophers, observing that this argument concerns, not temporal passage itself, but our *experience* of temporal passage, have suggested a different way round the argument. The fleetingness of our experience derives from the limits of what psychologists call our "specious present," that is to say, our

[84] Letter of Albert Einstein, March 21, 1955, cited in Banesh Hoffmann, *Albert Einstein: Creator and Rebel* (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1972), 258.
[85] A fact overlooked by R. T. Mullins, *The End of the Timeless God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 147.
[86] H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (New York: Berkeley Publishing, 1957), 10. Of course, the "passing along" must have reference to our *experience* of time's flow; contrary to Wells, psychological time passes at various rates.

subjective awareness of what is "now." The average person's now-awareness is just a fraction of a second. But the longer one's specious present, the less fleeting one's experience of life would be. If we could imagine someone who experienced a specious present which had the same duration as his entire life, such a person would experience his life all at once. These considerations led William Alston to claim that God's specious present has the same temporal extension as the whole of time, so that God has, indeed, at least experientially, complete possession all at once of interminable life. He writes,

> Just expand the specious present to cover all of time, and you have a model for God's awareness of the world. . . . a being with an infinite specious present would not, so far as his awareness is concerned, be subject to temporal succession at all. There would be no further awareness to succeed the awareness in question. *Everything* would be grasped in one temporally unextended awareness.[87]

Such a model would enable us to hold to God's being temporal and yet experiencing his entire life at once as a whole.

Nevertheless, a little reflection reveals that this model exacts far too high a price for the benefits it offers. (i) The reason we human beings have a specious present is due to our physical limitations, particularly the finite velocity of the transmission of signals along our nervous system. Because we do not have instantaneous transmission of such signals, there is a minimum threshold of the psychological present, so that events which occur too quickly cannot be experienced by us as consecutively present. But God, as unembodied Mind possessing maximal cognitive excellence, should possess no minimal, finite psychological present at all, much less an infinitely extended one. He is not dependent upon finite velocity neural processes which would slow down his apprehension of present events. And being maximally excellent cognitively, we should rather expect that he be able to distinguish discrete, consecutive events as present rather than unable. As one commentator has remarked, a God with an everlasting specious present would be infinitely slow on the uptake![88] In a literal

[87] William P. Alston, "Hartshorne and Aquinas: A Via Media," in *Existence and Actuality: Conversations with Charles Hartshorne,* ed. John B. Cobb, Jr. and Franklin I. Gamwell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 91. In all fairness to Alston, it must be admitted that he is using the specious present as "an intelligible model for a *nontemporal* knowledge of a temporal world" (Alston, 90, my emphasis). For a literal affirmation of God's having an everlasting specious present see Grace M. Jantzen, *God's World, God's Body* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1984), 65.

[88] Fitzgerald, "Relativity Physics," 267. Fitzgerald goes on to say, "This makes God out to be a sort of infinitely sluggish observer of the passing scene . . . . Contrary to what appears at first, it is a defect rather than a merit to have a specious present which is all inclusive."

sense, he would be mentally retarded. (ii) The specious present gathers into one now-awareness a period of time up to the present moment. Thus, if God had a specious present covering the whole of time, he would not experience his specious present until he had endured to the end of time. But then although God at that instant becomes aware of the succession of all events, it is too late for him to do anything about them, for they are already past by that point. Thus, God could not respond to individual events in time. God's providence is therefore obliterated by such a model. Worse, God could not even know what he himself had done throughout history until it was over. How he could even act in history without any consciousness of what was happening at the time the events occurred remains a mystery. A sort of backward causation would seem to be necessary to explain God's acts in time. All these untoward consequences result if time in fact has an end. But if time has no end, as the Christian doctrine of the afterlife teaches, then God *never* becomes conscious. There is no point at which all his cognitions of individual events can be gathered into a specious present, since there will always be time after that. Thus, the model becomes self-contradictory, for in order to have a specious present which takes in all of unending time, God's becoming conscious is indefinitely postponed such that he never has a specious present. (iii) It might be suggested that we loose the model from its physical basis in neurology and interpret God's specious present merely on the *analogy* of our specious present. God just has at every point in time a specious present which takes in the whole of time. But as studies in the philosophy of language have shown, the ability to apprehend tenses, that is to say, the ability to know what is happening *now*, is essential to timely action.[89] If God has the same specious present at every moment of time, then he has neither memory nor foreknowledge nor changing now-awarenesses. Thus, he is rendered impotent to act in a timely fashion, since he never knows what time it is. Instead of a variety of now-awarenesses at different times, he has at each time the same now-awareness. Hence, he is incapacitated to effect something at the time at which he is located. In short, it seems to me that the theory of God's having an everlasting specious present is utterly inept and so affords no escape from the present argument.

Perhaps, however, the realization that the argument for divine timelessness from the incompleteness of temporal life is essentially experiential in character opens the door for a temporalist alternative. When we recall that God is perfectly omniscient and so forgets absolutely nothing of the

[89] The seminal paper is John Perry, "The Problem of the Essential Indexical," *Noûs* 13, no. 1 (1979): 3–21.

past and knows everything about the future, then time's tooth is considerably dulled for him. His past experiences do not fade as ours do, and he has perfect recall of what he has undergone. To be sure, the past itself is gone (given a tensed or dynamic view of time), but his experience of the past remains as vivid as ever. A fatal flaw in Leftow's analysis is his assumption that God, like the widower, has actually lost the persons he loves and remembers. But according to Christian theism, this assumption is false. Those who perish physically live on in the afterlife, where they continue to be real and present to God. At worst, what are past are the experiences God has enjoyed of those persons, for example, Jones' coming to faith in Christ. But in the afterlife Jones lives on with God, and God can recall as though it were present his experience of Jones' conversion. So it is far from obvious that the experience of temporal passage is so melancholy an affair for an omniscient God as it is for us.

Moreover, it needs to be kept in mind that the life of a perfect person may have to be characterized by the incompleteness which would in other contexts be considered an imperfection. There is some evidence that consciousness of time's flow can actually be an enriching experience.[90] R. W. Hepburn cautions against downplaying the importance of the flow of consciousness in awareness of music, for example. Music appreciation is not merely a matter of apprehending tenselessly the succession of sounds. Quoting Charles Rosen to the effect that "The movement from past to future is more significant in music than the movement from left to right in a picture," Hepburn believes that the phenomenon of music calls into question any claim that a perfect mode of consciousness would be exclusively atemporal. All this goes to call into question premise

3. Temporal existence is a less perfect mode of existence than timeless existence.

of the argument for divine timelessness from the incompleteness of temporal life. Timeless life may not be the most perfect mode of existence of a perfect person.

Still, I think that we must admit that the argument has some force and could motivate justifiably a doctrine of divine timelessness in the absence of countermanding arguments. The question, then, will be whether the reasons for affirming divine temporality do not overwhelm this argument for divine timelessness.

[90] See the very interesting piece by R. W. Hepburn, "Time-Transcendence and Some Related Phenomena in the Arts," in *Contemporary British Philosophy: Personal Statements; Fourth Series*, ed. H. D. Lewis (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1976), 152–173.

7.3 Arguments for Divine Temporality

What arguments, then, might be offered for the view that God exists temporally? Of the various arguments on behalf of divine temporality, three stand out as especially significant.

7.3.1 Impossibility of Atemporal Personhood

According to the Christian doctrine of creation, God's decision to create a universe was a freely-willed decision from which God could have refrained. We can conceive, then, of a possible world in which God does refrain from creation, a world which is empty except for God. Would time exist in such a world? Certainly it would if God were changing, experiencing a stream of consciousness. As we have seen, even a succession in the contents of consciousness is sufficient to generate a temporal series.

But suppose that God were altogether changeless. Suppose that he did not experience a succession of thoughts but grasped all truth in a single, changeless intuition. Would time exist? A relationalist like Leibniz would say, "No," for there are no events to generate a relation of *earlier than* or *later than*. There is just a single, timeless state.[91]

Newton would have disagreed, of course. For him timeless existence was a logical impossibility. But so far as I can tell, Newton never offered any argument for thinking God to be temporal – he just asserted it. He regarded temporality and spatiality as inherent dispositions of being; that is to say, anything that exists must exist in time and space. But this assumption is far from obvious. Indeed, quite the contrary, it seems easy to conceive of God as transcending space, since he is incorporeal. Moreover, philosophers often regard abstract entities like numbers or universals as existing in neither time nor space. If timeless existence as such is not demonstrably impossible, then, why should we think that God could not exist timelessly? Let us stick with our envisioned empty world in which God alone exists. Why could God not exist timelessly in such a world?

One argument frequently raised in the literature is that timelessness and personhood are incompatible. Some philosophers have denied that a timeless God could be a self-conscious, rational being because he could

[91] It is true that there has been a good deal written recently about the possibility of time without change, and most contemporary relationalists espouse a view which allows there to be changeless periods of time sandwiched in between periods of change. See the seminal paper by Sydney Shoemaker, "Time without Change," *Journal of Philosophy* 66, no. 12 (1969): 363–381. But I know of no relationalist account which would allow a totally changeless world such as we are envisioning to be temporal. Such a world would, indeed, seem to be just a single, timeless state.

not exhibit certain forms of consciousness which we normally associate with personal beings (namely, ourselves). For example, Robert Coburn has written,

> Surely it is a necessary condition of anything's being a person that it should be capable (logically) of, among other things, doing at least some of the following: remembering, anticipating, reflecting, deliberating, deciding, intending, and acting intentionally. To see that this is so one need but ask oneself whether anything which necessarily lacked all of the capacities noted would, under any conceivable circumstances, count as a person. But now an eternal being would necessarily lack all of these capacities in as much as their exercise by a being clearly requires that the being exist in time. . . . Hence, no eternal being, it would seem, could be a person.[92]

Since God is essentially personal, he therefore cannot be timeless.

We can formulate this argument as follows (letting *x, y, z* represent certain properties allegedly essential to personhood):

1. Necessarily, if God is timeless, he does not have the properties *x, y, z*.
2. Necessarily, if God does not have the properties *x, y, z*, then God is not personal.
3. Necessarily, God is personal.
4. Therefore, necessarily, God is not timeless.

The argument, if successful, shows that timelessness and personhood are incompatible and, since God is essentially personal, it is timelessness which must be jettisoned.

The defender of divine timelessness may attempt to turn back this argument either by challenging the claim that the properties in question are necessary conditions of personhood or by showing that a timeless God could possess the relevant properties after all. With respect to the second strategy, even if Coburn were correct that a personal being must be capable of exhibiting the forms of consciousness he lists, it does not follow that a timeless God cannot be personal. For God could be *capable* of exhibiting such forms of consciousness but be timeless just in case he does not *in fact* exhibit any of them. In other words, the hidden assumption behind Coburn's reasoning is that God's being timeless or temporal is an essential property of God.

But that assumption seems dubious. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that God is in fact temporal. Is it logically impossible that God could have

[92] Robert C. Coburn, "Professor Malcolm on God," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 41, no. 2 (1963): 155.

been timeless instead? Think again of a possible world in which God alone exists, as required by God's freedom to refrain from creation. On any substantival view of time, such a world must be timeless, since God has not created time. On any relational view of time, God would be timeless if he is unchanging in such a world. In such an atemporal world God would lack certain properties which we suppose him to have in the actual world – for example, the property of *knowing what time it is* or the property of *co-existing with temporal creatures* – and he would have other properties which he lacks in the actual world – for example, the property of *being alone* or of *knowing that he is alone* –, but none of these differences seems significant enough to negate God's transworld identity. But then it seems that there are possible worlds in which God exists temporally and possible worlds in which he exists timelessly. God's temporal status is thus plausibly a contingent rather than essential property of God. So (apart from highly controversial claims on behalf of divine simplicity or immutability) there seems to be no reason to think that God is either *essentially* temporal or *essentially* timeless.[93]

So if timelessness is a merely contingent property of God, he could be entirely capable of remembering, anticipating, reflecting, and so on; only were he to do so, then he would not be timeless. So long as he freely refrains from such activities he is timeless, even though he has the *capacity* to engage in those activities. Thus, by Coburn's own lights God must be regarded as personal.

At a more fundamental level, it is in any case pretty widely recognized that most of the forms of consciousness mentioned by Coburn are not essential to personhood – indeed, not even the capacity for them is essential to personhood. Take remembering, for example. Any temporal individual who lacked memory would be mentally ill or less than human. But if an individual exists timelessly, then he has no past to remember. Similarly with regard to anticipation: since a timeless individual has no future, there just is nothing to anticipate. Nevertheless, given his omniscience, God would still know what takes place (tenselessly) at every time.

[93] It is noteworthy that R. T. Mullins' rejection of the view that God's temporal status is contingent is based upon his assumption that divine timelessness is part of the "hard core" of a research program committed to strong doctrines of divine simplicity, immutability, and impassibility (Mullins, *Timeless God*, 10, 73). In truth, it is these latter doctrines, especially divine simplicity, that bear the weight of his objections to divine timelessness (e.g., Mullins, 137, 145). Mullins never argues that timelessness as such excludes complexity, mutability, and passibility. Indeed, in saying that it is a "theological confusion" to claim that "The Trinity Entails a Particular Understanding of Eternality" Mullins tacitly admits that in a world in which the triune God alone exists, God might be timeless or temporal (Mullins, xviii; cf. 208). God's temporal status is therefore contingent.

As for reflecting and deliberating, these are ruled out not so much by God's timelessness as by his omniscience. An omniscient being cannot literally reflect and deliberate because he already knows the conclusions to be derived. Even if God is temporal, he does not engage in reflection and deliberation, for at every point in time he already knows the conclusions. But he is surely not impersonal as a result.

What about deciding, intending, and acting intentionally? All of these forms of consciousness are exhibited by a timeless God. With respect to deciding, again omniscience alone precludes God's deciding in the sense of making up his mind after a period of indecision. Even a temporal God does not decide in that sense. But God does decide in the sense that his will inclines toward one alternative rather than another and does so freely. It is up to God what he does; he could have willed otherwise. This is the strongest sense of libertarian freedom of the will. In God's case, because he is omniscient, his free decisions are either sempiternal or timeless rather than preceded by a period of ignorance and indecision.

As for intending or acting intentionally, there is no reason to think that intentions are necessarily future-directed. One can direct one's intentions at one's present state. God, as the Good, can timelessly desire and will his own infinite goodness. Such a changeless intention can be as timeless as God's knowing his own essence. Moreover, in the empty world we have envisioned, God may timelessly will and intend to refrain from creating a universe. God's willing to refrain from creation should not be confused with the mere absence of the intention to create. A stone is characterized by the absence of any intention to create but cannot be said to will to refrain from creating. In a world in which God freely refrains from creation, his abstaining from creating is a result of a free act of the will on his part. Hence, it seems that God can timelessly intend, will, and choose what he does.

Although Coburn does not mention it, we might add the capacity for self-consciousness as a necessary condition of personhood. Could a timeless God be self-conscious? In order to be self-conscious a being must hold beliefs about himself not only from the third-person perspective, such as, in God's case, "God is omnipotent" or "God believes that $2 + 2 = 4$," but also from the first-person perspective, such as "I am omnipotent" or "I believe that $2 + 2 = 4$." But it takes no more time to believe truly that "I have no human company," for example, than it does to believe "No human beings exist." For any truth God knows from a third-person perspective, we can formulate a corresponding belief from the first-person perspective. Hence, if God can be timelessly conscious, there is no reason that he cannot be timelessly self-conscious.

Now some theologians have objected to the picture I have painted of a timeless, solitary deity, for such a being lacks all inter-personal relationships, and such relationships, they believe, are essential to personhood. If God is to be personal, he must be engaged in relationships with other persons. But the give-and-take of personal relationships is said inherently to involve temporality.

In response to this objection, I think it would be extraordinarily difficult to prove that engaging in personal relationships, as opposed to the *capacity* to engage in personal relationships, is essential to personhood. A timeless God could have the capacity for such relationships even if, were he to engage in them, he would in that case be temporal. But let that pass. The more important assumption underlying this objection is the assumption that the persons to whom God is related must be *human* persons. But on the Christian conception of God, that assumption is false. Within the fullness of the Godhead itself, the persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit enjoy the inter-personal relations afforded by the Trinity. As a Trinity, God is eternally complete with no need of fellowship with finite persons. It is a marvel of God's grace and love that he would freely create finite persons and invite them to share in the love and joy of the inner Trinitarian life of God.

But would the existence of these Trinitarian inter-relationships necessitate that God be temporal? I see no reason to think that the persons of the Trinity could not be affected, prompted, or responsive to one another in an unchanging and, hence, timeless way. To use a mundane example, think of iron filings clinging to a magnet. The magnet and the filings need not change their positions in any way in order for it to be the case that the filings are stuck to the magnet because the magnet is affecting them and they are responding to the magnet's force. Of course, on a deeper level change is going on constantly in this case because the magnet's causal influence is mediated by finite velocity electro-magnetic radiation. Nonetheless, the example is instructive because it illustrates how on a macroscopic level action and response can be simultaneous and, hence, involve neither change nor temporal separation. How much more is this so when we consider the love relationship between the members of the Trinity! Since intra-Trinitarian relations are not based on physical influences or rooted in any material substratum but are purely mental, the response of the Son to the Father's love implies neither change nor temporal separation. Just as we speak metaphorically of two lovers who sit, not speaking a word, gazing into each other's eyes, as "lost in that timeless moment," so we may speak literally of the timeless mutual love of the Father, Son, and Spirit for one another.

The ancient doctrine of *perichoreisis,* championed by the Greek Church Fathers, expresses the timeless interaction of the persons of the Godhead.[94] According to that doctrine, there is a complete interpenetration of the persons of the Trinity, such that each is intimately bound up in the activities of the other. Thus, what the Father wills, the Son and Spirit also will; what the Son loves, the Father and Spirit also love, and so forth. Each person is completely transparent to the others. There is nothing new that the Son, for example, might communicate to the Spirit, since that has already been communicated. There exists a full and perfect exchange of divine love and knowledge, so that nothing is left undone which needs to be completed. In this perfect inter-penetration of divine love and life, no change need occur, so that God existing alone in the self-sufficiency of his being would, on a relational view of time, be timeless.

Thus, I think it is evident that God can enjoy inter-personal relations and yet be timeless. So even if we conceded that God is essentially timeless and that inter-personal relations are essential to personhood, it is still not true that if God is timeless, he cannot stand in inter-personal relations.

In conclusion, then, the argument for divine temporality based on God's personhood cannot be deemed a success. Advocates of a temporal God have not been able to show that God cannot possess timelessly the properties essential to personhood. On the contrary, we have seen that a timeless, divine person can be a self-conscious, rational individual endowed with freedom of the will and engaged in inter-personal relations.

All this has been said, however, in abstraction from the reality of a temporal universe. Given that such a universe exists, it remains to be seen whether God can remain untouched by its temporality.[95]

7.3.2 Divine Action in the World

In our thought experiment above, we abstracted from the actual existence of the temporal world and considered God existing alone without creation and asked whether he could exist timelessly. But, of course, the temporal world does exist. The question therefore arises whether God can stand in relation to a temporal world and yet remain timeless. It is very difficult to see how he can. Imagine once more God existing changelessly alone without creation, but with a changeless determination of his will to create a temporal world with a beginning. Since God is omnipotent, his will is done,

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[94] See St. John Damascene *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 2.1 (St. John of Damascus, *Writings*, trans. Frederic H. Chase, Jr. [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1958], 204).

[95] Mullins, *Timeless God*, chaps. 4–5, also discusses the following two arguments, principally in patristic and medieval rather than contemporary sources.

and a temporal world comes into existence. Can God remain untouched by the world's temporality? It seems not. For at the first moment of time, God stands in a new relation in which he did not stand before (indeed, there was no "before"). For at the moment of creation, God comes into the relation of *sustaining* the universe or, at the very least, of *co-existing with* the universe, relations in which he did not stand before. Since he is free to refrain from creation, God could have never stood in those relations, had he so willed. But in virtue of his creating a temporal world, God comes into a relation with that world the moment it springs into being. Thus, even if it is not the case that God is temporal prior to his creation of the world, he nonetheless enters into time in virtue of his real relation to the world. So even if God is timeless without creation, his free decision to create a temporal world also constitutes a free decision on his part to exist temporally.

The argument can be formulated as follows:

1. God is creatively active in the temporal world.
2. If God is creatively active in the temporal world, God is really related to the temporal world.
3. If God is really related to the temporal world, God is temporal.
4. Therefore, God is temporal.

This argument, if successful, does not prove that God is essentially temporal, but that if he is a Creator of a temporal world – as he in fact is –, then he is temporal.

One way to escape this argument is to deny (2). This might not appear to be a very promising strategy, since it seems obvious that God is related to his creatures insofar as he sustains them, knows them, and loves them. Remarkably, however, it was precisely this premise that medieval theologians like Aquinas denied. Thomas agrees with (3). On his view, relational properties involving God and creatures, like God's *being Lord*, first begin to exist at the moment at which the creatures come into being.[96] Hence, if God stands in real relations to his creatures, he acquires those relational properties *de novo* at the moment of creation and thus undergoes change. And anything that changes, even extrinsically, must be in time.

Thomas escapes the conclusion that God is therefore temporal by denying that God stands in any real relation to the world. Since God is absolutely simple, he stands in no relations to anything apart from himself, for relations would introduce complexity into God's being. Aquinas

[96] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.13.7.

holds, paradoxically, that while creatures are really related to God, God is not really related to creatures. The relation of God to creatures exists only in our minds (*secundem ratione*), not in reality. On Aquinas' view, then, God undergoes no extrinsic change in creating the world. He just exists, and creation is creatures' coming into existence with a real relation to God of being caused by God.

This is certainly an extraordinary doctrine. Wholly apart from its reliance on divine simplicity, the doctrine of no real relations is very problematic. God's sustaining the world is a causal relation rooted in the active power and intrinsic properties of God as First Cause. Thus, to say that the world is really related to God by the relation *is sustained by,* but that God is not really related to the world by the relation *is sustaining* seems unintelligible. It is to say that one can have real effects without a real cause – which seems self-contradictory or incomprehensible.

Moreover, God is surely really related to his creatures in the following sense: in different possible worlds, God's will, knowledge, and love are different than they actually are. For example, if God had not chosen to create a universe at all, he would surely have a different will than that which he has (for he would not will to create the universe); he would know different truths than the ones he knows (for example, he would not know *The universe exists*); he would not love the same creatures he actually loves (since no creatures would exist). It is the implication of Aquinas' view, however, that God is perfectly similar in every possible world: he never wills differently, he never acts differently, he never knows differently, he never loves differently. Whether the world is empty or chock-full of creatures of every sort, there is no difference in God. As we saw in our discussion of divine simplicity, such a claim forces the theist to embrace some sort of externalism with respect to God's states of knowing and willing.[97] Not only is such a position implausible, but it then becomes unintelligible why this universe or any universe exists rather than just nothing. The reason cannot lie in God, for he is perfectly similar in all possible worlds. Nor can the reason lie in creatures, for the reason must be explanatorily prior to creatures' existence. Thus, on Thomas' view there just is no reason for why this universe or any universe at all exists. Therefore, Thomas' attempt to evade the present argument by denying (2) is implausible.

Recent defenders of divine timelessness have turned their attention to (3) instead. They have tried to craft theories of divine eternity which would permit God to be really related to the temporal world and yet to exist timelessly.

[97] *Supra,* 174–182.

For example, Stump and Kretzmann attempted to craft a new simultaneity relation, which they believed would allow a timeless God to relate to his creation.[98] In order to craft a definition of this new type of simultaneity (which they abbreviate as ET-simultaneity), Stump and Kretzmann appeal to the analogy of the Special Theory of Relativity. They propose to treat modes of existence as analogous to reference frames in STR and to construct a definition of ET-simultaneity in terms of two reference frames (timelessness and temporality) and two observers (one in eternity and one in time). Their basic idea is as follows: Take some eternal being *x* and some temporal being *y*. These two are ET-simultaneous just in case relative to some hypothetical observer in the eternal reference frame *x* is eternally present and *y* is observed as temporally present, and relative to some hypothetical observer in any temporal reference frame *y* is temporally present and *x* is observed as eternally present.[99]

On the basis of their definition of ET-simultaneity, Stump and Kretzmann believe themselves to have solved the problem of how a timeless being can be really related to a temporal world. For relative to the eternal reference frame, any temporal entity which exists at any time is observed to be present, and relative to any moment of time God is observed to be present. The metaphysical relativity postulated by ET-simultaneity implies that all events are present to God in eternity and therefore open to his timeless causal influence. Every action of God is ET-simultaneous with its temporal effect.

Unfortunately, as many critics have pointed out, the language of observation employed in the definition is wholly obscure.[100] In STR very specific physical content is given to the notion of observation through Einstein's operational definitions of distant simultaneity. But in the definition of ET-simultaneity, no hint is given as to what is meant, for example, by *x*'s being observed as eternally present relative to some moment of time. In the absence of any procedure for determining ET-simultaneity,

[98] Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Eternity," *Journal of Philosophy* 78, no. 8 (1981): 429–458.

[99] A word of clarification: by "eternal" Stump and Kretzmann mean "timeless," and by "temporal reference frame" they mean "moment of time." It is also worth noting that this definition is not really analogous to simultaneity in STR at all. A better analogy would be to say that *x* and *y* are ET-simultaneous just in case they both exist at the same eternal present relative to the eternal reference frame and both exist at the same moment of time relative to the temporal reference frame. But then God would be temporal relative to our mode of existence, which Stump and Kretzmann do not want to say.

[100] Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God* (Grand Rapids: MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 20; Delmas Lewis, "Eternity Again: A Reply to Stump and Kretzmann," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 15 (1984): 74–76; Helm, *Eternal God*, 32–33; William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 164–166; John C. Yates, *The Timelessness of God* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990), 128–130; Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 170–172; Garrett J. Deweese, *God and the Nature of Time*, Ashgate Philosophy of Religion Series (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2004), 164.

the definition reduces to the assertion that relative to the reference frame of eternity *x* is eternally present and *y* is temporally present and that relative to some temporal reference frame *y* is temporally present and *x* is eternally present – which is only a restatement of the problem![101] Worse, if *y* is temporally present to God, then God and *y* are not ET-simultaneous at all, but temporally simultaneous. Thus, God would be temporally simultaneous with every temporal event, which is to sacrifice divine timelessness.

To their credit, Stump and Kretzmann later revised their definition of ET-simultaneity so as to free it from observation language.[102] Basically, their new account tries to define ET-simultaneity in terms of causal relations. On the new definition, *x* and *y* are ET-simultaneous just in case relative to an observer in the eternal reference frame, *x* is eternally present and *y* is temporally present, and the observer can enter into direct causal relations with both *x* and *y*; and relative to an observer in any temporal reference frame, *x* is eternally present and *y* is at the same time as the observer, and the observer can enter into direct causal relations with both *x* and *y*.

The fundamental problem with this new account of ET-simultaneity is that it is viciously circular.[103] For ET-simultaneity was originally invoked to explain how a timeless God could be causally active in time; but now ET-simultaneity is defined in terms of a timeless being's ability to be causally active in time. Our original problem was to explain how God could be both timeless and yet creatively active in the world. That is hardly explained by saying that a timeless God is ET-simultaneous with his effects in time and then defining ET-simultaneity in terms of the ability of a timeless being to be causally related to temporal effects. This amounts to saying that God can be causally active in time because he can be causally active in time. Since their first definition was explanatorily vacuous and their second definition viciously circular, Stump and Kretzmann must be judged to have failed in their attempt to undercut (3).

Leftow has offered a different account of divine eternity in order to refute (3).[104] On the Stump-Kretzmann model, there is no common reference frame or mode of existence shared by timeless and temporal beings. As a result, Stump and Kretzmann were unable to explain how such beings could be causally related. The essence of Leftow's proposal is to remedy

[101] Thus, Paul Helm, himself a defender of divine timelessness, is not being uncharitable when he complains that Stump and Kretzmann's "'solution' to the problem is found simply by rewording the problem with the help of the device of ET-simultaneity. ET-simultaneity has no independent merit or use, nothing is illuminated or explained by it" (Helm, *Eternal God,* 33).

[102] Stump and Kretzmann, "Eternity, Awareness, and Action," 477–478.

[103] Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 173.

[104] Brian Leftow, "Eternity and Simultaneity," *Faith and Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (1991): 148–179; cf. Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, chap. 10.

this defect by maintaining that temporal beings do exist in eternity; they share God's mode of existence and so can be causally related to God. But, he insists, this does not imply that time or temporal existence is illusory, for temporal beings also have a temporal mode of existence.

How can it be shown that temporal beings exist in timeless eternity? Leftow's argument is based on three theses:

I. The distance between God and every thing in space is zero.
II. Spatial things do not change in any way unless there is a change of place (a motion involving a material thing).
III. If something is in time, it is also in space.

On the basis of these theses Leftow argues as follows: there can be no change of place relative to God because the distance between God and everything in space is zero. But if there is no change of place relative to God, there can be no change of any sort on the part of spatial things relative to God. Moreover, since anything that is temporal is also spatial, it follows that there are no temporal, non-spatial beings. The only temporal beings there are exist in space, and none of them changes relative to God. Assuming, then, some relational view of time, it follows that all temporal beings exist timelessly relative to God. Thus, relative to God all things are timelessly present and so can be causally related to God.

The problem with this reasoning is that all three of its foundational theses seem false, some obviously so. (I), for example, rests pretty obviously on a category mistake. When we say that there is no distance between God and creatures, we do not mean that there is a distance and its measure is zero.[105] Rather we mean that the category of distance does not even apply to the relations between a non-spatial being like God and things in space. What about (II)? This thesis is false if time is tensed. For then spatial things can change even if there is no spatial motion by changing in their temporal properties. For example, some spatial object can change by being one year old and then becoming two years old, even if no change of place has occurred. Recall that even most relationalists

[105] There is a helpful illustration of the point from the history of Relativity Theory. In defending the existence of an aether, H. A. Lorentz had denuded the aether of virtually every physical property except the property of being motionless; the aether as he conceived it was virtually equivalent to the inertial frame of absolute space. Einstein once joked that all Einstein had done was to divest the aether of the last physical property Lorentz had left it: its state of motion. Einstein said that he was quite willing to admit the existence of an aether just so long as no state of motion is ascribed to it (A. Einstein, *Äther und Relativitätstheorie* [Berlin: Julius Springer Verlag, 1920], 7–9). Now in denying that the aether has a state of motion, Einstein was clearly not saying that the motion of the aether was zero. That was Lorentz's position: the aether is at rest; it has a state of motion and its measure is zero. What Einstein was saying is that the category of motion does not even apply to the aether: it is neither moving nor at rest. To think that it is is a category mistake.

are today willing to admit that time can go on during periods of spatial changelessness. So even if the entire universe were frozen into immobility, there would still be change relative to God, namely, change of temporal properties. Thus, if time is tensed – and Leftow allows that may be – then his theory is nullified. Finally, consider (III). Leftow needs this thesis, lest someone say that there are non-spatial, temporal beings like angels which are changing relative to God. Such beings would (on Leftow's analysis) have a zero distance from God and yet not be changeless relative to God. Thus, they would not exist in eternity. So in order to sustain his claim that temporal beings exist in eternity, Leftow has to deny the existence of such beings. He does so by means of the reductionistic thesis (III), which says that if anything exists in time it also exists in space. But we have every reason to reject this radical thesis. Even in the absence of a physical universe, God could choose to entertain a succession of thoughts or to create an angelic being who experiences a stream of consciousness, and such a series of mental events alone is sufficient for such entities' being in time.

Thus, all of Leftow's key theses are at least dubious, if not clearly false. We have little choice but to conclude that he has given no good grounds for thinking that temporal beings exist in timeless eternity. Thus, Leftow's theory proves no more successful than Stump and Kretzmann's in explaining how God can be timeless and yet causally related to the world.

In summary, it seems to me that we have here a powerful argument for divine temporality. Classical attempts like Aquinas' to deny that God is really related to the world and contemporary attempts like those of Stump, Kretzmann, and Leftow to deny that God's real relation to the world involves him in time all appear in the end to be less plausible than the premises of the argument itself.

7.3.3 Divine Knowledge of Tensed Facts

We have seen that God's action in the temporal world gives us good grounds for concluding God to be temporal in view of his standing in new relations with the world. But the existence of a temporal world also seems to entail God's temporality in view of his knowledge of what is happening in the temporal world. For since what is happening in the world is in constant flux, so also must God's knowledge be in constant flux. Defenders of divine temporality have argued that a timeless God cannot know certain tensed facts about the world – for example, what is happening now – and therefore, since God is omniscient, he must be temporal.

We can formulate the argument as follows:

1. A temporal world exists.
2. God is omniscient.
3. If a temporal world exists, then if God is omniscient, God knows tensed facts.
4. If God is timeless, he does not know tensed facts.
5. Therefore, God is not timeless.

Again, this argument does not prove that God is essentially temporal, but, if successful, it does show that if a temporal world exists, then God is temporal. Defenders of divine timelessness have attempted to refute this argument either by arguing that a timeless God can know tensed facts or by arguing that God may still qualify as omniscient even if he is ignorant of tensed facts.

Consider first the plausibility of denying premise (4). Can a timeless God know tensed facts? Jonathan Kvanvig contends that he can.[106] Kvanvig's defense of this claim is based upon his analysis of beliefs in terms of a personal attitude, the factual content of a belief, and a particular way of accessing or grasping that factual content. Take a sentence like "Today is June 1, 1999." Kvanvig contends that the same factual content is expressed by the sentence "Today is June 1, 1999," when that sentence is used on June 1, 1999, as is expressed by the sentence "Yesterday was June 1, 1999," when that sentence is uttered on June 2, 1999. In his view temporal indexical words express the individual essence of the moment they refer to. In this example, the words "today" and "yesterday," by expressing the essence of the moment referred to, pick out the same time. A person will grasp this factual content *directly* only if he grasps it at the very time referred to (in which case he will form a present-tense belief), and a person will grasp the same content *indirectly* if he does so not at that time (in which case a temporal person will form beliefs involving other tenses).

In God's case, then, if he is timeless, he grasps the factual content of tensed sentences indirectly and so does not form tensed beliefs as we do, who grasp some factual content directly. Therefore, Kvanvig concludes, "one can affirm the doctrines of timelessness, immutability and omniscience by affirming that God indirectly grasps every temporal moment, and directly grasps none of them."[107]

[106] Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *The Possibility of an All-Knowing God* (New York: St. Martin's, 1986), 150–165.
[107] Kvanvig, 159.

Does Kvanvig's theory succeed in giving an account of how a timeless God can know tensed facts? It seems not. For on Kvanvig's analysis the essences of the times picked out by temporal indexical words do not include the tense of those times. Otherwise a time would be, say, essentially past, in which case it is impossible for that time ever to have been present or future, which is absurd. Words like "today" and "yesterday" could not refer to the same day, since they, being different in tense, would express different essences. And God could not timelessly grasp the factual content involving such essences, since if he grasped a moment which is essentially present, he would exist at the time of that moment. Thus, it is evident that the factual content expressed by tensed sentences is, on Kvanvig's analysis, tenseless. Tense is merely a feature of our mental state, the by-product of how we grasp the tenseless factual content of tensed sentences. Kvanvig explicitly denies that there is any temporal element expressed by tensed sentences which is not part of their factual content. Thus, on Kvanvig's view tense is merely linguistic: there are no tensed facts.

Thus, Kvanvig's account backfires. Far from explaining how a timeless God can know tensed facts, on his analysis there are no tensed facts to be known. The factual content expressed by the sentence "Kvanvig now teaches at Texas A & M" is something like *Kvanvig teaches* (tenselessly) *at Texas A & M at time t*." God, grasping this factual content indirectly, has no idea where Kvanvig is now teaching or whether he has even been born or is long dead and buried.

A somewhat similar, but crucially modified, account of God's knowledge of tensed facts has been offered by Edward Wierenga.[108] On Wierenga's view the factual content of a present-tense sentence includes the tense expressed in the sentence. Like Kvanvig, he believes that moments of time have individual essences. Unlike Kvanvig, however, Wierenga seems to believe that the individual essence of a moment somehow involves the present tense. If the factual content of a sentence includes a moment's individual essence, then that content will involve presentness. Anyone who grasps that content at the time referred to will form a present-tense belief about what is "now" the case.

Wierenga contends that a timeless God is able to grasp the factual content of a tensed sentence, but without forming a present-tense belief as we do. For one forms a present-tense belief only if one both exists at the time referred to in the factual content of a sentence and grasps that content at that time. God grasps this factual content timelessly and so forms no

[108] Edward R. Wierenga, *The Nature of God: An Inquiry into Divine Attributes* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 179–185.

present-tense belief about what is "now" going on. Thus, God knows tensed facts without having tensed beliefs.

Does Wierenga's account of God's knowledge of tensed facts fare any better than Kvanvig's analysis? The crucial difference between them is that Wierenga makes presentness a feature of the individual essence of every moment of time. At first blush this might seem hopelessly incoherent. If the essence of *every* moment of time involves presentness, then every moment of time would be present and no moment would ever be future or past, which makes nonsense of time. Wierenga could escape this absurdity, however, by advocating *presentism,* according to which the only time which exists is the present time. According to presentism, future times do not yet exist and past times no longer exist. Therefore, there literally are no times which have the properties of pastness or futurity. When a time becomes past, it does not exchange the property of presentness for the property of pastness; rather it just ceases to exist altogether. Thus, the individual essences of all moments of time could involve presentness. This does not imply that all moments of time are somehow permanently present. Rather it implies that times are present when and only when they exist. They come into existence successively and are present just as long as they exist. No time exists which is not present, but that does not imply that all times are present together.

If the individual essence of every moment of time somehow involves presentness, then the question is whether a timeless God can grasp the factual content involving such an essence. It remains extraordinarily difficult to understand how on Wierenga's account God can grasp the essence of a time without that time's being present for him. Consider the analogy (which Wierenga himself appeals to) of first-person indexical words like "I". If my individual essence is, as Wierenga says, the property of just *being me,* then how can God possibly grasp the factual content of a sentence which includes this essence? If I say, "I feel ill," then God could grasp the fact that *William Craig feels ill*; but if the factual content of this sentence includes my individual essence of *being me,* expressed by the word "I," then a "Private Access Only" sign is posted before the route to this factual content, which is open to me alone. Even God could not grasp this content, since he and I are not the same person.

Analogously, if the individual essence of a time involves presentness, then in order to grasp the factual content of a sentence involving such an essence one would need to be present. If I say, "John left three hours ago," then there is no problem in a timeless God's grasping factual content involving the time *t* and the property *being such that John leaves three hours earlier than then,* which is ascribed to *t* – no problem that is, so long as *t* is

a tenseless date or clock-time. But if *t* involves presentness, then God, in grasping *t* as present, must be in the present, that is to say, must be temporal. Later at *t′* it will be true that "John left four hours ago," and God will no longer grasp the essence of *t*, but of *t′*, for *t* is no longer present. It is always true that John *leaves* three hours earlier than *t*, and God immutably knows that fact. But if he is to know tensed facts, he must know that *t* is present. Thus, his factual knowledge must be constantly changing, in which case God must be in time. Hence, in making presentness part of the individual essence of every time, Wierenga succeeds only in temporalizing God.

Finally, consider Leftow's account of God's timeless knowledge of tensed facts.[109] It will be recalled that on Leftow's view all events exist in eternity, where they are eternally actual, even though in time these same events are past, present, or future. Thus, relative to God's frame of reference, it seems that there are no tensed facts to be known. Relative to eternity no event is known as temporally past, present, or future, for all events are timelessly present to God.

But Leftow maintains that God also knows events as they exist relative to various temporal frames of reference. Leftow says that God knows "all the facts of simultaneity" relative to any temporal reference frame.[110] Thus, God would know that relative to the temporal frame R_1 events e_1 and e_2 are simultaneous, whereas relative to R_2 e_1 is earlier than e_2. But clearly such knowledge does not constitute knowledge of tensed facts, as Leftow believes. It is merely knowledge of the classes of simultaneous events at any time relative to any reference frame. Since simultaneity is a purely tenseless relation, it will not yield knowledge of what is past, present, or future relative to any frame. God could at best know relative to any frame the tenseless location of any event (its date and time) and its tenseless relation to any other event (whether it is *earlier than, simultaneous with,* or *later than*). But he would not know, even relative to a temporal frame of reference, what events are past, present, or future. (If he did, his knowledge concerning that frame would be constantly changing, and thus he would exist in the time of that frame.)

Indeed, Leftow's explanation of what he calls "factual omniscience" makes it evident that on his view God's knowledge is tenseless. For he contends that the same fact renders true *It is now 3:00* and *It is then 3:00* at their respective times. The fact which makes these statements true can be grasped independently of the times at which they are true. Thus, he concludes, God can be factually omniscient even if he cannot grasp tensed truths.

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[109] Leftow, *Time and Eternity,* 312–337.
[110] Leftow, 334.

This explanation reveals that on Leftow's view there really are no tensed facts. For a tensed fact like *its now being 3:00* can only be grasped at 3:00. One can timelessly grasp *its being 3:00 at 3:00* or *its being 3:00 earlier than 4:00,* but such knowledge leaves one completely in the dark as to whether 3:00 is past, present, or future. Since on Leftow's account God knows all facts and the only temporal facts known to God are tenseless facts, it follows that there are no tensed facts. Thus, Leftow's account of God's knowledge fails to supply him knowledge of tensed facts.

Kvanvig, Wierenga, and Leftow's accounts are the most sophisticated attempts to explain how God can be timeless and yet know tensed facts, yet they all fail. Thus, premise (4) of the argument for divine temporality from God's knowledge of tensed facts seems secure.

The defender of divine timelessness seems to have no recourse, then, but to deny premise (3). He must deny that omniscience entails a knowledge of tensed facts. He can do this either by revising the traditional definition of omniscience or else by maintaining that tense, while an objective feature of time, does not strictly belong to the factual content expressed by tensed sentences. Let us examine each strategy in turn.

The general problem with the strategy of revising the traditional definition of omniscience is that any adequate definition of a concept must be in line with our intuitive understanding of that concept. We are not free simply to "cook" the definition arbitrarily just to solve some problem under discussion. According to the traditional definition, a person is omniscient if and only if, for every fact, he knows that fact and does not believe its contradictory. On such a definition, if there are tensed facts, an omniscient person must know them. What plausible alternative definition of omniscience might the defender of divine timelessness offer?

Wierenga, as a sort of second line of defense, offers a revised account of omniscience which would not require God to know tensed facts.[111] Some facts, he says, are facts only from a particular perspective. They must be known to an omniscient being only if he shares that particular perspective. Thus, a person is omniscient if and only if, for every fact and every perspective, if something is a fact from a certain perspective, then that person must know that it is a fact from that perspective, and if that person shares that perspective, then he must know the fact in question. Wierenga treats moments of time as perspectives relative to which tensed facts exist. So while a temporal person existing on December 8, 1941, must (if he is omniscient) know the fact *Yesterday the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor,* a

[111] Wierenga, *Nature of God,* 189. Recall our discussion of Wierenga's account of divine omniscience *supra*, 205.

timeless person must know only that from the perspective of December 8, 1941, it is a fact that *Yesterday the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor*. On this definition God's omniscience does not require that he know the tensed fact, but only the tenseless fact that from a certain perspective a certain tensed fact exists.

Wierenga's revised definition of omniscience seems to me to be unacceptably "cooked." He is not denying that there are tensed facts. Rather Wierenga wants to allow that there really are tensed facts but to maintain that an omniscient being need not know them. This claim seems quite implausible. On Wierenga's view temporal persons like you and me know an incalculable multitude of facts of which God is ignorant. Temporal persons know that the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor is over; God has no idea whether it has occurred or not. He knows merely that for people on December 8, 1941, and thereafter it is a fact that the attack is over. Since he does not know what time it actually is, he does not know any tensed facts. This is an unacceptably limited field of knowledge to qualify as omniscience.

As we saw in our discussion of divine omniscience, Leftow also entertains the idea of revising the definition of omniscience in such a way that omniscience does not entail knowledge of tensed facts.[112] He argues, in effect, that there are many sorts of truths which God cannot know, so there is no harm in admitting one more class of truths (namely, tensed truths) of which God is ignorant. Leftow is so deeply committed to divine timelessness that he is prepared to restrict or even jettison God's omniscience in order to preserve his timelessness.

Leftow's strategy here is strangely defeatist. As Christian theologians we ought to construe God's knowledge as robustly as possible. If it turns out that there are truths that God cannot know, that is no reason for further eroding the extent of his knowledge by denying him knowledge of tensed truths. Leftow's readiness to abandon God's omniscience in order to preserve his timelessness strikes me as an odd set of theological priorities: abandoning a central doctrine that enjoys considerable scriptural support in order to hold on to a controversial doctrine at best intimated in Scripture.

In any case, we have seen that Leftow does not succeed in showing that there are truths which God cannot know. His examples of things God cannot know all involve non-propositional knowledge, which falls outside the scope of the traditional definition of omniscience. Therefore, he has not adequately motivated the denial that God knows tensed facts.

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[112] Leftow, *Time and Eternity,* 321–333. See *supra*, 213–214.

It seems to me, therefore, that no adequate grounds have been given for thinking that someone could be omniscient and yet not know tensed truths. The traditional definition of omniscience requires it, and we have no grounds which do not involve special pleading for revising the usual definition.

So what about the second strategy for denying premise (3), namely, maintaining that tense does not, strictly speaking, belong to the factual content expressed by tensed sentences, even though tense is an objective feature of the world? As we saw in our study of omniscience,[113] tense might be analyzed as a feature of the mode in which the factual content is presented to someone expressing it, or of the way in which a person grasps the factual content, or of the context of someone's believing the factual content. Alternatively, tense could be understood in terms of a person's ascribing to himself in a present-tense way the property of being such as the factual content expressed by the sentence specifies. On such analyses, an omniscient being could be timeless because omniscience is traditionally defined in terms of propositional knowledge and tense is not part of the propositional content of tensed sentences. Tense is an objective feature of the world, but since it does not belong to the factual content of a sentence, a being which knew only tenseless facts could on the traditional definition count as omniscient.

Fortunately, I do not think that a discussion of these recondite semantical theories will be necessary here, for even though I find such analyses plausible and attractive, I do not think that they ultimately serve to save the day for the defender of divine timelessness. For according to Christian theism, God is not merely factually omniscient, but also maximally excellent cognitively. On the theories under discussion a merely factually omniscient God would know such things as *God is omnipotent, God loves his creatures, God created the universe,* and so on. But he would not have to possess any first-person indexical beliefs like "I am omnipotent," "I love my creatures," "I created the universe," and so forth. A machine could count as omniscient under such analyses. But such a God or machine would clearly not have maximum cognitive excellence. In order to qualify as maximally excellent cognitively, God would have to entertain all and only the appropriate, true first-person beliefs about himself. This would furnish him with knowledge *de se* (first-person self-knowledge) in addition to mere knowledge *de re* (knowledge of a thing from a third-person perspective). In order to be maximally excellent cognitively, God would not have to possess all knowledge *de se* in the world, but only such knowledge *de se* as

[113] See *supra*, 206–207.

is appropriate to himself. It would be a cognitive defect, not a perfection, for God to have the belief "I am Napoleon," though for Napoleon such a belief would be a perfection. The point is that omniscience (on these theories) is not enough for perfect being theology; God must be maximally excellent cognitively.

Now in the same way, it is a cognitive perfection to know what time it is, what is actually happening in the universe. A being whose knowledge is composed exclusively of tenseless facts is less excellent cognitively than a being who also knows what has occurred, what is occurring, and what will occur in the world. This latter person knows infinitely more than the former and is involved in no cognitive defect in so knowing. On the analogy of knowledge *de se*, we can refer to such knowledge as knowledge *de praesenti* (knowledge of the present). A being which lacks such knowledge is more ignorant and less excellent cognitively than a being which possesses it. Accordingly, if we adopt views according to which tense is extraneous to the factual content expressed by a tensed sentence, we should simply revise premise (3) to read

> 3′. If a temporal world exists, then if God is maximally excellent cognitively, then God has knowledge *de praesenti,*

and, with appropriate revisions, the argument goes through as before.

In response to the contention that God, being maximally excellent cognitively, must have knowledge *de praesenti,* Kvanvig offers two alternatives.[114] One alternative would be to maintain that God grasps all moments of time directly. But this alternative makes no sense, for then all moments of time would be apprehended by God as present, not in the metaphorical sense of the eternal "present," but as temporally present. That would annul all temporal relations of *earlier than/later than* among events and leave God ignorant of which moment really is present. The other alternative is simply to give up the doctrine of divine timelessness. In Kvanvig's opinion the arguments for this doctrine are not compelling, so that if it is incompatible with God's omniscience or cognitive excellence, then it can be abandoned. This is the conclusion to which the present argument seems to be driving us.

Such a conclusion goes down hard with Leftow, however.[115] In his view if timelessness and omniscience are incompatible, then we should give up the doctrine of omniscience. For he contends that a timeless God who is

[114] Kvanvig, *All-Knowing God,* 159–160.
[115] Leftow, *Time and Eternity,* 323–326.

ignorant of tensed facts is more perfect on the whole than an omniscient God who is temporal.

How shall we assess such a comparison? We have already examined Leftow's claim that the life of a temporal being is inferior to the life of a timeless being due to the former's incompleteness. While the argument has some plausibility, we found its force diminished, interestingly, due to a temporal God's omniscient power to recall or anticipate past and future events. On the other hand, the superiority of temporal over timeless existence, we have discovered, lies in the ability which is afforded uniquely by temporal existence for God to be causally related to a temporal world. The incarnation of the second person of the Trinity is a special thorn in the side of advocates of divine timelessness. Leftow also attempts to downplay the importance of the attribute of omniscience, arguing that it is not essential to perfect knowledge. He rightly observes that cognitive perfection involves many other qualities than just the breadth of one's knowledge. Assuredly; but that is no reason to doubt that cognitive perfection should not encompass knowledge of tensed facts. Leftow also argues that omniscience is impossible, since God could not know the factual content expressed by sentences containing personal indexical words, such as "I am overweight." But we have already seen how such knowledge *de se* can be handled without recourse to private, first-person facts. And in any case, placing one restriction on God's knowledge hardly makes it a matter of indifference if additional abridgments are proposed. To be as knowledgeable as possible is an important perfection which magnifies God's greatness. Thus, it seems to me a poor bargain, indeed, to auction off omniscience in order to purchase timelessness.

The attempt to deny premise (3) of the present argument thus seems to fare no better than the effort to refute premise (4). If God is omniscient, then given the existence of a temporal world, he cannot be ignorant of tensed facts.

From the premises of the argument, it follows that God is not timeless, which is to say, he is temporal. So in addition to the argument from God's real relation to the world, we now have a second powerful reason based on God's changing knowledge of tensed facts for thinking that God is in time.

7.4 Eternity and the Nature of Time

On the basis of our foregoing discussion, we have seen comparatively weak grounds for affirming divine timelessness but two powerful arguments in

favor of divine temporality. It would seem, then, that we should conclude that God is temporal.

But such a conclusion would be premature. For there does remain one way of escape still open for defenders of divine timelessness. The argument based on God's real relation to the world assumed the objective reality of temporal becoming, and the argument based on God's knowledge of the temporal world assumed the objective reality of tensed facts. If one denies the objective reality of temporal becoming and tensed facts, then the arguments are undercut. For in that case, nothing to which God is related ever comes into or passes out of being, and all facts known by God are tenseless, so that God undergoes neither extrinsic nor intrinsic change. He can be the immutable, omniscient Sustainer and Knower of all things and, hence, exist timelessly.

In short, the defender of divine timelessness can escape the arguments of the previous section by embracing a tenseless theory of time.[116] According to such a theory of time, all things and events in time are equally existent. Events in time are related by the tenseless relations of *earlier than, simultaneous with,* and *later than*. But the distinction between past, present, and future is not an objective distinction, being merely a subjective feature of consciousness. If there were no minds, there would be no past, present, or future. There would be just the four-dimensional space-time universe existing *en bloc*.

The person looking at Figure 2 stands in the place of God, who transcends space and time (of course, the viewer must imagine himself as unchanging). The space-time universe is *intrinsically* temporal in that it has an internal dimension which, in virtue of its ordering relations (*earlier/later than*), is time. But the space-time universe is *extrinsically* timeless in that it is not embedded in some higher dimension (a hyper-space-time) but co-exists timelessly with God.

Given such a static view of time, it is easy to see why God never experiences extrinsic change in relation to temporal events. For there is no temporal becoming. Nothing in the space-time block ever comes into

[116] Mullins, *Timeless God*, 24, rightly reminds us that there are a variety of tensed and tenseless theories. But it does not follow that the distinction between tensed and tenseless theories is therefore "unhelpful." What is crucial here is not just the ontology of time but the objectivity of tensed facts and temporal becoming. A coherent tenseless theory of time denies both the objectivity of tensed facts as well as temporal becoming. The way in which issues of tense and temporal becoming have become central to recent discussions of divine eternity is evident in the way in which these issues dominate recent treatments such as Natalja Deng's survey in her *God and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); and William Hasker, "Eternity and Timelessness of God," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021), https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119009924.eopr0130.

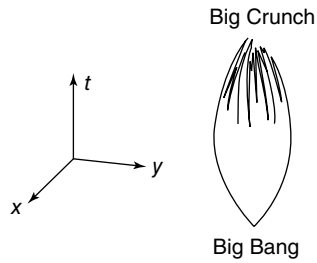

Figure 2 A depiction of a tenselessly existing space-time universe. The vertical dimension *t* represents time, which begins at the Big Bang and ends at the Big Crunch. The *x*, *y* dimensions represent 3-dimensional space, one dimension of which cannot be pictured on the diagram because its place is assumed by the *t* dimension.

or goes out of being, nor does the space-time block as a whole come into being or pass away. It simply exists timelessly along with God. God is the Creator of the universe in the sense that the whole block and everything in it depends upon God for its existence. God by a single timeless act makes it exist. By the same act he causes all events to happen and things to exist at their tenseless temporal locations. Thus, God never acquires or loses any of his relations. God does not come into the relation *Creator of* with the Big Bang at t_0 and cease to stand in this relation at a later time t_n. Rather he timelessly stands in the *Creator of* relation to all events at their respective times. Thus, by denying the reality of temporal becoming, the defender of divine timelessness can undercut premise (2) of the argument for divine temporality based on God's real relation to the world. God is really related to the world, but he is not temporal.

Similarly, on a static theory of time there really are no tensed facts. The factual content of sentences containing tensed verbs and temporal indexicals includes only tenseless locations and tenseless relations of events. Linguistic tense is an ego-centric feature of language users. It serves only to express the subjective perspective of the user. Thus, there really are no tensed facts for God to know. There is no objective truth about what is now happening in the universe, for "now" serves merely to signify the time relative to which the tensed judgement is made. Every person at every time in the space-time universe regards his time as "now" and others as "past" or "future." But in objective reality there is no "now" in the world. Everything just exists tenselessly. God, in knowing the tenseless times at which events occur and the tenseless temporal relations among them, knows all the objective facts there are. Thus, premise (3) of the argument for divine temporality based on God's knowledge of the temporal world is undercut. In knowing all tenseless facts, God is truly and timelessly omniscient.

The defender of divine timelessness therefore has a way out: he can adopt a tenseless theory of time and deny the reality of tensed facts and temporal becoming.[117] It is noteworthy, however, that very few defenders of divine timelessness have taken this route. One of the few proponents of timeless eternity to do so is Paul Helm. On his view there is no difference in the reality of the past, present, and future: "Do the times which are at present future to us exist, or not?" he asks. "Answer: they exist for God. . . and they exist for those creatures contemporaneous with that future moment, for that moment is present to them, but it is not now present to us."[118] In the same way, "the past event . . . belongs in its own time, and is therefore real, belonging to the ordered series of times which comprise the creation and which are. . . eternally present to God."[119] Thus, Helm affirms, "in creation God brings into being (timelessly) the whole temporal matrix," and "God knows *at a glance* the whole of his temporally ordered creation . . . ."[120] Similarly, tense is but an ephemeral feature of language; the truth conditions of tensed sentences are given by tenseless facts, facts which are known to God.[121] Helm thus appears to be one of the few advocates of divine timelessness who have seen and taken the way out.[122]

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[117] Mullins, *Timeless God*, 147–155, disagrees. He argues that even given a tenseless theory of time, divine timelessness cannot be saved. But Mullins' argument consists mainly of criticizing some very confused assertions of T. J. Mawson, *Belief in God: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 49–50, which do not faithfully represent the position under discussion and are therefore a straw man (148–152). The partisan of tenseless time will not assert, *pace* Mawson, that God exists at any time in the four-dimensional space-time block but rather that he transcends it and sustains it as a whole in being. What Mawson should say is that if there were no time, then at no time would it be true that *God exists*, but given that there is time, it is true at every time that *God exists* (tenselessly). Mullins also argues that "some of the arguments against divine timelessness work on presentism and four-dimensional[ism]" (Mullins, *Timeless God*, 152). But the question is not whether the arguments work against such a teratological hybrid but against a view that precludes the objectivity of tense as well as temporal becoming. When it comes to such a view, Mullins is forced to fall back on his objections to divine simplicity: "God is the source of each instant by being cognitively and causally related to each instant. Does this help? No. A simple God is identical to his cognition and his cognition is temporally spread out. Thus, God is temporally spread out" (Mullins, *Timeless God*, 153). If God is not simple, then his tenselessly knowing (and causing) a multiplicity of tenseless facts indexed to different times is no obstacle to his timelessness.

[118] Paul Helm, "Eternal Creation: The Doctrine of the Two Standpoints," in *The Doctrine of Creation: Essays in Dogmatics, History and Philosophy*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 42.

[119] Helm, 43.

[120] Helm, *Eternal God,* 27, 26.

[121] Helm, 25, 44, 47, 52, 79.

[122] Helm is followed now by Katherin Rogers, who asserts, "This statement of the nature of divine eternity in which all of time is 'present' to God entails a particular theory of time. . . . The 'bizarre' view entailed by the classic doctrine of eternity is eternalism, the view that the past and future are as real as the present. . . . On eternalism 'past', 'present' and 'future' are all existent, but can be distinguished relative to a given observer at a given time" (*Perfect Being Theology* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000], 59). Moreover, "The temporal term 'present' is analogous to the spatial term 'here'. 'Past' and 'future' are analogous to 'there' in that, though existent, they are not 'here'" (Rogers, 60). Cf. Katherin A. Rogers, "Anselm on Eternity as the Fifth Dimension," *Saint Anselm Journal* 3, no. 2 (2006): 1–8; Katherin A. Rogers, "Anselmian Eternalism: The Presence of a Timeless God," *Faith and Philosophy* 24 (2007): 3–27. We should resist the label "eternalism" as grossly misleading, since temporal events are not eternal, as God is.

An adjudication of the doctrine of divine timelessness is therefore made feasible by – and probably necessitates – an adjudication of the debate between a tensed and a tenseless theory of time. Few philosophical theologians have been willing seriously to undertake this task. But if our discussion of the nature of divine eternity is not to end inconclusively at this point, philosophical theologians have no option but to explore this question: Is a tenseless theory of time a credible and theologically acceptable option? In raising this question, one enters into the very heart of the philosophy of time and space. This is difficult and mysterious territory. But we have no choice: if we are to understand eternity, we must first understand time.

I have undertaken the task of adjudicating the debate between tensed and tenseless theories of time in two companion volumes.[123] Unfortunately, space (in the practical sense!) does not permit an exploration of this question here. I shall therefore rest content with summarizing my findings there. The superiority of a tensed theory of time over a tenseless theory of time may be shown by means of the following considerations.

I. Arguments for a Tensed Theory of Time
- **A.** Tensed sentences, which can neither be translated into synonymous tenseless sentences nor be given tenseless, token-reflexive truth conditions, correspond, if true, to tensed facts.
- **B.** The experience of temporal becoming, like our experience of the external world, is properly regarded as veridical.

II. Refutation of Arguments against a Tensed Theory of Time
- **A.** McTaggart's celebrated paradox is based upon the misguided marriage of a tenseless ontology of events or things with objective temporal becoming, as well as the unjustified assumption that there should exist a unique, complete description of reality.
- **B.** The passage of time is not a myth, but a metaphor for objective temporal becoming, a notion which can be consistently explicated on a presentist metaphysic.

III. Refutation of Arguments for a Tenseless Theory of Time
- **A.** Temporal becoming is compatible with Relativity Theory if we reject space-time realism in favor of a neo-Lorentzian interpretation of the formalism of the theory.
- **B.** Time as it plays a role in physics is a pale abstraction of a richer metaphysical reality, omitting indexical elements such as the "here"

[123] See my *The Tensed Theory of Time: A Critical Examination* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000) and *Tenseless Theory of Time*.

and the "now" in the interest of universalizing the formulations of natural laws.

IV. Arguments against a Tenseless Theory of Time

- **A.** In the absence of objective distinctions between past, present, and future, the relations ordering events on a tenseless theory are only gratuitously regarded as genuinely temporal relations of *earlier/later than*.
- **B.** The claim that temporal becoming is mind-dependent is self-defeating, since the subjective illusion of becoming involves itself an objective becoming in the contents of consciousness.
- **C.** A tenseless theory entails perdurantism, the doctrine that objects have spatio-temporal parts, a view which is metaphysically counter-intuitive, incompatible with moral accountability, and entails the bizarre counterpart doctrine of transworld identity.
- **D.** A tenseless theory is theologically objectionable, since its claim that God and the universe co-exist tenselessly is incompatible with a robust doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*.

For all these reasons I am convinced that time is tensed and that therefore God exists in time.

7.5 Concluding Remarks

Given the objectivity of tensed facts and temporal becoming, it follows from God's creative activity and omniscience that, given the existence of a temporal world, God is also temporal. God quite literally exists now. Since God never begins to exist nor ever ceases to exist, it follows that God is omnitemporal. He exists at every time that ever exists. In that sense it can be truly said that God has always existed and will always exist. This might seem to imply that God has existed for infinite time in the past and will exist for infinite time in the future. But what if the temporal world has not always existed? According to the Christian doctrine of creation, the world is not infinite in the past but was brought into being out of nothing a finite time ago. Did time itself also have a beginning? Did God exist literally before creation or is he timeless without the world? This fascinating question shall be taken up in our locus *De creatione*.[124]

[124] See this *Systematic Philosophical Theology*, vol. III, *De creatione,* pt. I.3: God, Time, and Creation.

8
Omnipresence

The question of divine eternity and God's relationship to time naturally raises the analogous question of divine omnipresence and God's relationship to space. Just as an eternal God can be conceived to be either temporal or atemporal, so an omnipresent God can be conceived to be either spatial or aspatial, that is to say, either God may exist in space or God may transcend space. If God does exist in space, then his omnipresence requires that he exist, not merely somewhere, but everywhere in space or omnispatially. Only in very recent years have contemporary philosophical theologians begun to address the question of the nature of divine omnipresence.[1]

8.1 Biblical Data Concerning Divine Omnipresence

The biblical data pertinent to divine omnipresence almost one-sidedly support God's omnispatiality. On the one hand the Scriptures consistently speak of God as being in space. He accompanies his people to the promised land and dwells in their midst in the innermost sanctum of the Tabernacle and later the Temple (Ex 29.44–46; II Chron 7.1–3). He later departs

[1] As recently as 2006 Robert Oakes could observe that divine omnipresence, despite its "absolutely integral" status for classical theism, has received "perplexingly scant analytic attention from latter-day philosophical theists" (Robert Oakes, "Divine Omnipresence and Maximal Immanence: Supernaturalism versus Pantheism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 43, no. 2 [2006]: 171). Oakes' own discussion has now been largely overtaken. *The Oxford Handbook of Omnipresence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, (accepted for publication)) will unfortunately not appear in time for me to take cognizance of it.

Systematic Philosophical Theology: On God: Attributes of God, Volume IIa, First Edition.
William Lane Craig.
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from the Temple, leaving his disobedient people desolate and condemned to judgement (Ez 9.3; 11.23). His Spirit comes upon people (Num 11.16–17, 25; Jdg 3.9–10; 6.34; 11.29; 14.5–6; etc.) and in the post-Pentecostal church age indwells believers (I Cor 6.19–20; Heb 3.5–6).

At the same time, the Scriptures firmly insist that God is not confined to any localized place, even the Temple. At the dedication of the Temple Solomon prays, "I have built thee an exalted house, a place for thee to dwell in for ever," but then adds, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!" (I Kg 8.13, 27). Solomon recognizes that though heaven, not the Temple, is God's proper dwelling place (v. 30), even heaven cannot circumscribe God. The psalmist affirms that God is everywhere:

> Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?
> Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
> If I ascend to heaven, thou art there!
> If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!
> If I take the wings of the morning
> and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
> even there thy hand shall lead me,
> and thy right hand shall hold me. (Ps 139.7–10)

God is here described as present not only throughout the world but also in heaven and in the nether realm of the dead. Similarly, Jeremiah declares, "Am I a God at hand, says the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? says the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the LORD" (Jer 23.23–24). The spatial terminology is unmistakable: God is both near and far and fills heaven and earth, leaving no void.

In the NT one of the most striking affirmations of God's unlimited spatial presence comes in Paul's Areopagus address, where he contrasts the pagan goddess Athena's dwelling place with God's all-pervading presence:

> The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything. And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, for
>
> 'In him we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17.24–28).

The Scriptures thus present God as everywhere present in space.

The question remains as to the theological weight to be ascribed to these passages. Here we do well to recall Paul Helm's point respecting God's relationship to time, that the biblical writers may have lacked the reflective context for raising questions about divine temporality vs atemporality – the same goes for God's spatiality vs aspatiality.[2] The purpose of the above passages is not to teach metaphysics but to remind or assure us of God's universal sovereignty, inescapability, and accessibility. Indeed, the thrust of passages about God's dwelling in heaven is to emphasize his transcendence, not his spatial location.[3] In saying that even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain God, Solomon's prayer actually leans in the direction of God's transcending space.[4] Even though God's heaven, like the physical heavens (skies) are described in spatial language, so that God may be said to sit on his throne in heaven (Ps 11.4; 103.19–21), to look down from heaven (Ps 14.2; 33.13; 53.2; 113.5–6), and to descend from heaven (Gen 11.5, 7; 18.20–21), such language is anthropomorphic on any account and may be figurative language indicative of God's transcendence (cf. Eph 4.9–10; II Cor 12.2). Biblical authors were well aware that Gen 1.1 teaches that in the beginning the transcendent God created the heavens and the earth, so that everything that exists apart from God was created by him (Jn 1.1–3). If space is a substance, then, given divine aseity and *creatio ex nihilo*, it is an implication of biblical teaching that space was created by God. It is interesting how God's knowledge and activity are so intimately associated in scriptural passages like those above on God's universal presence (cf. Ps 139.1–6, 11–18; Heb 4.12–13). The transcendent God is certainly active in space and knows what is going on everywhere in space, but is he literally in space himself? Once again, the biblical data are underdeterminative, putting the question into the hands of the philosophical theologian.

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[2] See *supra*, 287.

[3] See Helmut Traub and Gerhard von Rad, "οὐρανός, κτλ.," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,* ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1967), 5:497–543; see esp. "D. New Testament 2, God in Heaven," 520–521. Traub explains, "Heaven and earth, both in their relationship and also in the superiority of heaven over earth, are a symbolical representation of the relation of God as Lord and Creator to his lordship and creation. Thus at no point, not even when used in the sense of firmament and atmosphere, does the term οὐρανός lose this symbolical character" (514). God's heaven, in contrast to the astronomical heavens, is not a spatial location at some distance from the Earth but a sphere of divine sovereignty and activity.

[4] Iain Provan comments, "The hearing of prayer is done from heaven (v. 30). This is (if anywhere is) the dwelling place of God. Even then, however, God cannot, strictly speaking, dwell in even the highest heaven (v. 27). Being utterly transcendent, God cannot be 'placed' at all; all human language about dwelling must be qualified constantly, so that attempts to describe do not in fact minimize" (Iain W. Provan, *1 and 2 Kings* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995], 79). John Olley comments, "Solomon's actions and language succinctly express again God's being present and yet transcendent" (John W. Olley, *The Message of Kings: God Is Present* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011], 97).

8.2 Divine Omnispatiality

8.2.1 Spatial Location Relations

Contemporary discussion of divine omnispatiality intersects recondite debates among metaphysicians over mereology and location relations.[5] The seminal treatment for contemporary debates over spatial location is a widely circulated, but to my knowledge, as yet unpublished article by Josh Parsons.[6] Inspired by David Lewis' distinguishing two ways in which an object might temporally persist, which Lewis denominated *endurance* and *perdurance*,[7] Parsons distinguished two ways in which an object might be spatially extended: *entension* and *pertension*. "Entension, then, is the spatial version of endurance, 'pertension' being analogous to 'perdurance', and 'extension', the neutral term, analogous to 'persistence'."[8] As Parsons uses the term, then, "When an object is located in multiple places, whether wholly or partially, it *extends*."[9] If an object is located in multiple places by virtue of having distinct parts in those places, then it *pertends*. If it is located in multiple places by being wholly located in those places, then it *entends*. Entension thus involves what we earlier encountered in our discussion of divine simplicity,[10] namely, mereologically simple objects which are nonetheless spatially extended, that is to say, objects having no proper parts but covering or occupying extended regions of space.

Intriguingly for students of divine omnipresence, Parsons takes as his point of departure, not the hypothesis that there are extended, simple objects located within a surrounding region of space, such as an electron, but the Spinozistic hypothesis that there is only one material thing that fills all of space. Such an object cannot be pertended – filling space by having proper spatial parts – because *ex hypothesi* there is only one object

[5] For a helpful survey, see Cody Gilmore, "Location and Mereology," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2018 Edition), §5 "Extended Simples," https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/location-mereology/.

[6] Josh Parsons, "Entension, *or* How It Could Happen That an Object Is Wholly Located in Each of Many Places" (unpublished manuscript, March 4, 2003), PDF file, https://philpapers.org/archive/PAREO.pdf, archived at https://perma.cc/4CSQ-WK7C.

[7] Lewis wrote, "Let us say that something *persists*, iff, somehow or other, it exists at various times; this is the neutral word. Something *perdures* iff it persists by having different temporal parts, or stages, at different times, though no one part of it is wholly present at more than one time; whereas it *endures* iff it persists by being wholly present at more than one time" (David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986], 202). We encountered this distinction in passing in noting the ontological differences between tensed theories of time, which are naturally associated with objects' enduring through time, and tenseless theories of time, which are naturally associated with objects' perduring across equally existent times (*supra*, 353).

[8] Parsons, "Entension," 2.

[9] Parsons, 1. This is, as we shall see, an idiosyncratic understanding of extension, for an object which is located at just two points in space is not extended in the normal sense of the word, since points are extensionless.

[10] *Supra*, 102–103.

and, hence, no parts.[11] It must therefore be entended, wholly present at every subregion of space as well as at universal space.[12] The hypothesis is theologically provocative, for if a material object can be wholly present at every spatial region it occupies, including all of space, then how much more might an immaterial being like God, who has no physical parts, be entended throughout all of space!

Such a hypothesis leads Parsons to draw a crucial distinction between an object's being *entirely* located at some place and its being *wholly* located at some place: an object is entirely located at some place when there is no non-overlapping region at which it is also located; by contrast, an object is wholly located at some place when all its parts are located at that place.[13] Obviously, this is a technical terminological distinction, which makes no pretense of capturing ordinary language usage.[14] In a later piece, Parsons illustrates the difference:

> When I say that I am all in the office – that I am not stepping over the threshold or sticking an arm out of the window – there are two things I might mean. One is that I am *entirely* in the office, in the sense . . . that everywhere disjoint from the office is free of me. The other thing I might mean is that I am *wholly* in the office: that none of me is missing from the office; every part of me is in the office.[15]

The rub is that an extended, simple object could be, contrary to ordinary usage, wholly in a place without being entirely in that place. If it is in a place, it is wholly in that place because it has no proper parts, and so all its parts are in that place; it has no parts not in that place. But it may not be entirely in that place, for there may be regions of space disjoint from the place in question where it also is. As an extended simple object, it will be wholly present, not only at every distinct subregion of the region it occupies, but may also be wholly present at regions that are not subregions of that region. Assuming that I am a composite object, Parsons explains:

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[11] Parsons, "Entension," 2. It is evident that Parsons speaks of parts in a metaphysically heavyweight sense.

[12] Note that Parsons ignores the possibility, which will emerge in subsequent discussions, that an object might be located only in the universal space but not in any of its subregions; such an object is sometimes said to "span" space. Parsons remarks, "The term 'located' also lends itself to some ambiguity. In my usage, an object is located at [some place] *r* iff it is located at all of *r*'s subregions" (Parsons, 3).

[13] Parsons, 4.

[14] As Parsons later says, I don't claim that 'wholly' and 'entirely' have these different meanings in ordinary language. But it is one thing to say, 'I have no parts missing from here', and another to say 'No place disjoint from here is a place where I am'. One statement asserts the non-existence of a certain kind of thing, the other the non-existence of a certain kind of place" (Josh Parsons, "Theories of Location," in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, ed. Dean W. Zimmerman [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007], 3: 212–213).

[15] Parsons, 212.

> Whole location and entire location tend to go around together. When I'm entirely in the office, I'm also wholly in the office; if I reach an arm out the window, I'm not entirely in the office, because I'm also in the street, but also, I'm not wholly in the office, because my arm isn't in the office. However, suppose the extended simple sphere were hovering over the sill of my window: it would be neither entirely in the office (for it is also in the street) nor entirely in the street (for it is also in the office). But it would be wholly in the office (for it has no part save itself, and that part is in the office) and wholly in the street (for it has no part save itself, and that part is in the street).[16]

The envisaged situation is disorienting and perhaps even metaphysically impossible, but it is conceptually possible for an object to have all its parts in a place and so be wholly there, while at the same time occupying regions that do not overlap the region where it is, so that the region it entirely occupies is a fusion of disjoint regions. "What is distinctive of entension," says Parsons, "is that an entended object is wholly located in places other than those at which it is entirely located – or, equivalently, that it is wholly located at more than one place."[17]

Apart from his discussion of the Spinozistic God, Parsons makes no application of his theory of location to theism. That task was taken up by the Christian philosopher Hud Hudson a few years later. While acknowledging his debt to Parsons, Hudson offers definitions of "entirely located" and "wholly located" and of "pertending" and "entending" that, he says, "use a different primitive and have different content" than Parsons' definitions.[18] Concerning the first difference, Hudson assumes "a primitive and fundamental occupation relation," *located at*.[19] Though undefined, Hudson says, "I am using 'is located at'. . . in such a way that the object completely

[16] Parsons, 212.

[17] Parsons, "Entension," 4.

[18] Hud Hudson, "Omnipresence," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 214.

[19] Hudson notes that "I shall use 'occupies' and 'is located at' interchangeably. Accordingly, no region is located at itself" (Hud Hudson, *The Metaphysics of Hyperspace* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005], 98n3), presumably because no region occupies itself. In personal correspondence, Hudson later differentiated between "occupies" and "is located at," reserving the former for material objects, so as to allow regions to be located at themselves (Hud Hudson to Hayden Stephan, May 17, 2017). This gives no comfort to Cowling and Cray, however, who defend an account of spatial presence based on the *rejection* of the principle that "*x* exists at a region *r* if and only if *x* occupies some (proper or improper) subregion of *r*." This allows them to claim "that one can reasonably assert that God lacks any location, but that, in asserting that God is everywhere, one can reasonably assert that God nevertheless exists at all regions" (Sam Cowling and Wesley Cray, "How to Be Omnipresent," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 54, no. 3 [2017]: 223–234). Since "at" is a locative term and since they reject reductive (or "dependence") accounts of omnipresence as well as occupation accounts, I can make no sense of their claim and thus find their view unintelligible.

fills any region at which it is located."[20] The idea here is that the object fits, as it were, hand-in-glove in the space it occupies.[21] As medieval philosophers put it, the surface of the three-dimensional object precisely matches the two-dimensional surface of its spatial receptacle. Here are Hudson's definitions of "entirely located at" and "wholly located at": For any object *x* and non-point-sized region *r*:

> "*x* is entirely located at *r*" $=_{\text{def}}$ *x* is located at *r*, and there is no region of spacetime disjoint from *r* at which *x* is located.
>
> "*x* is wholly located at *r*" $=_{\text{def}}$ *x* is located at *r*, and there is no proper part of *x* not located at *r*.

Curiously, these definitions are virtually quotations of Parsons' semi-formal definitions:

> **Definition of 'entirely located'**: *x* is entirely located at *r* iff *x* is located at *r* and there is no region of space-time disjoint (i.e., not sharing a subregion) from *r* at which *x* is located.
>
> **Definition of 'wholly located'**: *x* is wholly located at *r* iff *x* is located at *r* and there is no proper part of *x* (i.e., a part of *x* not identical to *x*) not located at *r*.[22]

So far as I can tell, the only difference between Parsons and Hudson on this score, at least, is that Hudson quantifies only over non-point-sized regions, whereas Parsons quantifies over places, which include spatial points.[23] One might think to justify such a restriction on the grounds that Hudson is presumably offering an account of ways in which things might be spatially extended, thereby excluding points from consideration. But as Hudson remarks in a footnote, "I use 'non-point-sized' rather than 'extended' in order to be neutral (i.e., in order to leave open the possibility of a receptacle that is the fusion of at least two yet no more than countably many

[20] Hudson, *Hyperspace*, 99.

[21] This fact leads Hayden Stephan to adjust Hudson's definitions to read "exactly located;" but Hudson resists such a move, commenting, "I intend to avoid the locution 'exactly occupies'. It may seem that there is a very natural way to introduce this notion given the definitions that appear below, but as we will see in the discussion to follow, we will have some unexpected options to choose from when assigning a meaning to that phrase" (Hudson, *Hyperspace*, 99n4). Parsons, as we shall see, means something quite different by "exactly located."

[22] Parsons, "Entension," 4.

[23] Parsons remarks, "I'm not assuming that there are points or instants, but I do mean 'time' and 'place' in a sense according to which if there are points, then they are places; and if there are instants, then they are times" (Parsons, "Theories of Location," 206). Just as instants are degenerate intervals of time, so points are degenerate regions of space.

point-sized regions – a region which would then be both non-point-sized and non-extended)," since extension requires a non-denumerable number of points.[24] Since Hudson's account is not limited to extended regions, it arbitrarily excludes point-sized regions, an exclusion which will by definition preclude another account of spatial entension, as we shall see.

As for pertending and entending, Hudson offers the following:

> "*x* pertends" $=_{\text{def}}$ *x* is an object that is entirely located at a non-point-sized region, *r*, and, for each proper subregion of *r*, *r**, *x* has a proper part entirely located at *r**.
>
> "*x* entends" $=_{\text{def}}$ *x* is an object that is wholly and entirely located at a non-point-sized region, *r*, and for each proper subregion of *r*, *r**, *x* is wholly located at *r**.

Again, apart from the restriction to non-point-sized regions, there does not appear to be anything about these definitions with which Parsons would disagree. Although he does not offer semi-formal definitions of "pertension" and "entension," Parsons avers that "'is entended' can readily be defined in terms of pure location relations and mereology," just as Hudson has done.[25]

Now in addition to pertension and entension, Hudson conceives of two additional ways, not allowed by Parsons, for objects to be spatially extended: what he calls spanning and multiple locating. These are defined as follows:

> "*x* spans" $=_{\text{def}}$ *x* is an object that is wholly and entirely located at exactly one non-point-sized region, *r*, and there is no proper subregion of *r*, *r**, such that any part of *x* is located at *r**.
>
> "*x* multiply locates" $=_{\text{def}}$ *x* is an object that is located at more than one region, and *x* is not located at the fusion of the regions at which *x* is located.

Parsons, for his part, can make no sense of Hudson's two additional modes of extension. He complains that Hudson's primitive location relation signified by "located at," being undefined, is "deeply obscure."[26] Parsons thinks that we can resolve the ambiguity of "located at" easily by appealing to our pre-theoretic understanding of space. In place of Hudson's single primitive,

[24] Hudson, *Hyperspace*, 99n6; cf. Hudson, "Omnipresence," 214.
[25] Josh Parsons, "Hudson on Location," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 76, no. 2 (2008): 430. He boasts, "I can define entension in terms any substantivalist can understand."
[26] Parsons, 428.

Parsons postulates four "pure location relations," which he explicates informally as follows:

> I am weakly located in my office iff I am in my office in the weakest possible sense: iff my office is not completely free of me.
>
> I am entirely located in my office iff I am in my office and I am not anywhere outside my office; that is, iff I am in my office and everywhere outside my office is completely free of me.
>
> I am pervasively located in any place, none of which is free of me.
>
> I am exactly located anywhere that I am both entirely and pervasively located.

To these he adds two principles:

> **Functionality:** No entity has more than one exact location.
>
> **Exactness:** If something has a weak location, then it also has an exact location.

Functionality is a consequence of exact location, and exactness a consequence of weak location. Functionality might appear to rule out something's being located in two disjoint places, which possibility Parsons defends. But the point is that the exact location of such an object is the fusion of its disjoint regions. So it has only one exact location.

"Entension" can then be defined in terms of these pure location relations and the principles of mereology governing wholes and parts. But this cannot be done with respect to spanning and multilocating. As a result, Parsons says he cannot really understand what spanners and multi-locators are. He muses:

> My best take on what Hudson is up to is that he does not intend to mean any of the pure location relations by 'located at'. He wants to tell us about a proposed theoretical primitive that he would distinguish from any of the location relations I discuss. Moreover, it couldn't possibly be defined in terms of them. H-location, as we might call it, is sufficient but not necessary for pervasive location. So, Hudson would agree, on this interpretation, that it's conceptually true, in virtue of what I mean by 'pervades', that every object pervades every subregion of a region it pervades; and that every object pervades every fusion of regions it pervades. Non-exotic objects – objects other than spanners and multi-locators – are H-located in every region they pervade. But spanners and multi-locators in different ways fail to be H-located in some region they pervade.[27]

[27] Parsons, 432.

That is to say, something can pervade *r* without being located at *r*. For example, a multilocator pervades the fusion of all the regions it pervades but is not located there. A spanner pervades all subregions of a region it pervades but is not located in any of them. Since we have no idea what the relation "is located at" is, this is obscure.

Hudson rejoins that Parsons is "conceptually impoverished insofar as he fails to grasp a certain relation," namely, Hudson's natural and primitive location relation.[28] Hudson points out that all parties will agree that for each material object, we can specify just one region that has the unique distinction of being the fusion of all the regions at which it is located. But whether or not an object bears the exact location relation to that fusion of regions is precisely one of the points in contention between the multiple location, spanning, entension, and pertension theorists. All parties will agree that for each material object, there will be at least one region where it is exactly located, but they will not unite in the gratuitous addition that there is at most one. Consequently, either we can expect agreement on Functionality with respect to an object's fusion but not on whether the object is exactly located there, or we can expect agreement on some region at which an object is exactly located but not on whether it is there uniquely. "If one simply insists on the conceptual necessity of the thesis that location . . . just has to be exactly one footprint in substantival space he will be accused by the multiple location theorist of trying to eliminate him from the game before it even begins. . . . coming to a persuasive verdict on this issue won't be accomplished by forcing a multiple choice among the four pure location relations."[29]

Given Functionality and Exactness, the four pure location relations are all interdefinable. But why grant Functionality and the definition of "exactly located"? In his review article Gilmore notes that there is considerable sympathy for not deciding questions of spatial location simply by definition.[30] He worries that Parsons' definition of exact location makes it an analytic truth that nothing has two different exact locations. For from the premise that:

> Necessarily, for any *x* and any *r*, *x* is exactly located at *r* if and only if for any *r**, *x* is weakly located at *r** if and only if *r* overlaps *r** (by the definition of 'is exactly located at').

[28] Hud Hudson, "Reply to Parsons, Reply to Heller, and Reply to Rea," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 76, no. 2 (2008): 456.
[29] Hudson, 456, 458.
[30] Gilmore, "Location and Mereology," §2.1.

one may infer that

> Necessarily, for any x, any r_1, and any r_2, if x is exactly located at r_1 and x is exactly located at r_2, then $r_1 = r_2$.

Gilmore comments, "The argument may persuade some. However, those who are initially inclined to take the possibility of multilocation seriously may see this argument as a reason to doubt the first premise and the associated definition."[31] Such scepticism, however, leaves unaddressed Parsons' point that his location relations are based on our pre-theoretic understanding of space, in contrast to Hudson's ambiguous primitive, which leaves us in the dark.

Now some advance has been made in finding a plausible alternative to Parsons' definition by Roberto Loss. In his account the primitive relation is *plural pervasive location* – a many-one relation between objects and a region, making it possible for many objects to only collectively pervade a certain region of space. He provides this intuitive gloss on the notion of plural pervasive location: a plurality of objects *xx* collectively pervade or, as we can say, 'fill', a certain region *r* just in case *r* is not free of any of the *xx* (so that each of the *xx* contributes to fill *r*) and every subregion of *r* is not free of all the *xx* (so that the *xx* do not leave out any part of *r*, so to say).[32] One can also provide an intuitive gloss for the primitive notion of singular basic filling:

> **Singular basic filling:** An entity x basically fills a region r if and only if no part of r is free of x and the size of r is not bigger than the size of x.

Singular basic filling allows for exact multilocation if we define the notion of exact location as follows:

> (11*) x is *exactly located* at $r =_{\text{def}}$ x fills r, and every region that is filled by x and that has r as a part is identical to r.

Given the ongoing discussion of location relations, it would be premature to close the door on the conceptual possibility of exact multilocation and spanning and, hence, of accounts of divine spatiality in terms of either multilocation or spanning.

[31] Gilmore, §6.4.
[32] Roberto Loss, "Somewhere Together: Location, Parsimony and Multilocation," *Erkenntnis* 88, no. 2 (2023): 675–691. I am indebted to Cody Gilmore for this reference.

8.2.2 Divine Ubiquitous Entension

Hudson proposes that we understand divine omnipresence as God's ubiquitous entension.[33] "Once again, to entend is to be wholly and entirely located at some non-point-sized region (in the case of omnipresence, at the maximally inclusive region) and to be wholly located at each of that region's proper subregions (in the case of omnipresence, at every other region there is)."[34] Hudson observes that "if there is no maximal region," that is to say, if space is so big that every region of space has proper superregions, "then omnipresence would simply amount to being wholly present at each of the infinitely many contained regions."[35]

But other location relations can, like entension, be employed to provide alternative accounts of divine omnipresence. A ubiquitous spanner is located wholly and entirely only at the all-inclusive region of universal space and does not even have parts located at various subregions. It leapfrogs over all the subregions of space, as it were, to be located exclusively in the universal region. A ubiquitous multilocator is quite the opposite: it fails to be located in the universal spatial region, even though it is located in whole or in part in all of the various subregions. It is scattered in space, as it were, and never achieves full unity. The term "multiple location" or "multilocation" is thus something of a misnomer. Entending objects have multiple locations. What is distinctive about Hudson's multilocators is that they are not located at the fusion of the regions where they are located. Accordingly, Hudson's multilocation is better denominated non-maximal location, for no such object is located in all of space. A ubiquitous non-maximal locator would be present in every subregion of space but not in their fusion. Hudson himself rejects accounts of divine omnipresence in terms of spanning and non-maximal location as "too restrictive."[36] For as a ubiquitous spanner God would fail to be present at every region of space, and as a ubiquitous non-maximal locator God would fail to occupy space itself as a whole.

Hudson applies his account of ubiquitous entension to six puzzles posed by divine spatiality:

The problem of simplicity: How can something that is not mereologically composite occupy more than one region of space? Hudson's response is: precisely because God is not mereologically composite, he has no part that fails to be present at any region and so is wholly present there. Hudson's

[33] Hudson, "Omnipresence," 209.
[34] Hudson, 209.
[35] Hudson, 214.
[36] Hudson, 209.

response to this puzzle does not really resolve the problem but just repeats that there can be extended simples.

The problem of multilocation: How can something occupy (in the sense of being "wholly present at") two numerically distinct regions of space? Once more, the answer is: by entending. In virtue of being entended, God is wholly present even in non-overlapping regions of space, no matter how distant from one another, and so has multiple locations. Again, Hudson's response does not really address the question of how such presence is metaphysically possible.

The problem of containment: How can something that is essentially free of the constraints that bind all creaturely things occupy a region of space? In order to avoid God's being constrained by space, Hudson suggests that God stands in occupation relations accidentally, not essentially, since God could have refrained from creating the universe and would have existed even if there had been no regions of space at all. Indeed, we might add, on Hudson's assumed substantivalist view of space, according to which space is itself a substance, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* implies that God created space at some time in the finite past and, therefore, there is a state of affairs in the actual world in which God exists spacelessly.[37] Presumably, God entered space at the moment of creation.

The problem of timelessness: How can something occupy a region of space and be atemporal? Hudson points out that it is a truism that if God occupies a region of spacetime, then he is temporal. But even in the case of space alone, we might add, a spatial God is plausibly temporal as well. For while a mathematical space is or may be timeless, the actual space in which we and the universe exist is not timeless, for it is the arena of constant activity, as things all about God are changing and even passing through him. Moreover, the very arena itself is changing, as space expands from its beginning in the big bang on into the future. Hudson says of God's relationship to time what he says of his relationship to space: God may be merely accidentally temporal. Had he refrained from creation, God would have existed anyway and perhaps existed atemporally.

The problem of incorporeality: How can something occupy a region of space and fail to have a body? Hudson opines that "My own view of the matter is anything that occupies a region is a material object, and that the occupier inherits the shape, size, dimensionality, topology, and boundaries of the region in which it is entirely located. . . . God will then exemplify the shape, size, dimensionality, topology, and boundaries of whatever is the

[37] For *creatio ex nihilo*'s implying a beginning of the universe, see this *Systematic Philosophical Theology*, vol. III, *De creatione*, pt. I, Creation, Conservation, and Concurrence.

most inclusive region."[38] Presumably Hudson's restriction of God's shape, size, and so on, to the region he entirely occupies is due to his mereological simplicity: just as the simple homogeneous sphere hovering over one's windowsill is spherical in shape even though it occupies a hemispherical region in one's office, being wholly located in that region, so God, though located in subregions having different shapes and sizes, has himself the size and shape of the entire universe. An "unavoidable cost" of ubiquitous entension is, then, in Hudson's view some kind of divine embodiment.[39]

The problem of co-location: How can two numerically distinct things each occupy the same region of space? Entension has nothing to contribute here; rather Hudson appeals to the common answer that they can do so provided that they are of fundamentally different kinds. God is plausibly of a fundamental kind all his own.

I have already alluded to a fourth conceptually possible account of divine spatiality in addition to accounts involving pertension, entension, spanning, and non-maximal location, namely, an account which allows that God may be wholly located at every point of space but not at any non-point-sized region of space. Just as something existing or occurring at an instant of time has temporal location but not temporal extension, God could have spatial location without spatial extension. In personal correspondence Hudson notes that while such an account satisfies the definition of "multi-locates" in his paper, it is even *stronger* than multilocation because it involves non-maximal location *plus* being wholly located at just each of the point-sized regions.[40] Since any region whatsoever is made up of points and God is located at each of those points, God is clearly everywhere, even though God is not located at any extended region made up of those points. Hudson suggests that we can make clear this special way of relating to an extended region by means of a new definition, such as:

> "x intersects a region r" $=_{\text{def}}$ for any point-sized subregion r^* in r, x is wholly located at r^*.

We may accordingly call such an account an intersection account of spatial location. Hudson thinks that an account of divine omnipresence as ubiquitous intersection allows one to handle the problems of simplicity, multilocation, containment, timelessness, and co-location in the same way that ubiquitous entension does. With respect to

[38] Hudson, "Omnipresence," 210–211; cf. Hudson, *Hyperspace*, 112.
[39] Hudson, "Omnipresence," 211.
[40] Hud Hudson, personal communication to William Lane Craig, August 3, 2021.

incorporeality, an intersection account would avoid the oddity of God's having the changing shape and size of the universe as well as any pressure to say that God has different shapes and sizes at different regions. Hudson reminds us that "God would be 0-dimensional" and "would still have the shape and size and boundaries of a geometrical point (at each of the regions at which God was located)."[41] But this is to forget that in Hudson's view, an occupant of space inherits the shape, size, dimensionality, topology, and boundaries of the region in which it is *entirely* located. Since on an intersection account, God is located at every point, he fails to satisfy the definition of "entirely located": for any point where he is located, there will be other points at which he is also located. Therefore, on Hudson's account at least, God will have none of the geometrical and topological properties mentioned. Though located at a point, God need not inherit the relevant properties of that point. Such an intersection account need not be seen as a rival account to the above-mentioned accounts, however, for one may simply expand the other accounts to include spatial points as well as non-point-sized regions, a natural move it seems, since those accounts already include non-extended regions, as previously observed.

8.2.3 Substantivalism vs. Relationalism

A final noteworthy feature of Hudson and Parsons' accounts is that they both take the proffered accounts to be committed to substantivalism about space (or spacetime). That is to say, they both assume that space is a fundamental substance or thing which exists independently of objects and their relations.[42] Hudson in particular is fairly emphatic on this point. He says that "the rules of our game have been set by the substantivalist dualist—who . . . thinks that an inhabiting object is distinct from a hosting region and that both entities are genuine pieces of the world's furniture."[43] The relationalist, who reduces regions to material objects, events, and the spatial relations they bear to one another, "isn't in the game."[44] The relationalist dismisses the question of how God is related to spatial regions: "'In no way

[41] Hudson to Craig, August 3, 2021.
[42] A substantivalist space, Hudson explains, "is a concrete particular with an ontological status not reducible to relations between those material objects and events which bear to it a variety of occupation and orientation relations" (Hudson, *Hyperspace*, 97). On the debate between substantivalism and relationalism see John Earman, *World Enough and Space-Time: Absolute versus Relational Theories of Space and Time* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989); Graham Nerlich, *What Spacetime Explains: Metaphysical Essays on Space and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
[43] Hudson, "Reply to Parsons," 457.
[44] Hudson, 457–458.

at all,' says the relationalist, 'for regions do not exist.'"[45] Therefore in treating divine omnipresence, Hudson's "working assumption" is substantivalism about space or spacetime. [46] The same working assumption governs Parsons' treatment of location relations.

Now this situation is unfortunate for the systematic theologian. However plausible and widely accepted substantivalism might be, it would be imprudent for the Christian theologian to tie Christian doctrine to such a view. If we make substantivalism a necessary condition of divine ubiquity in space, then such an assumption makes divine ubiquity less probable and forces relationalists and other non-substantivalists to adopt other accounts of divine omnipresence. Therefore it is worth asking whether relationalists must reject divine spatial ubiquity.

It is far from clear that they must. In characterizing relationalism Hudson neglects the difference between *reductive* accounts of space and *derivative* accounts of space.[47] This distinction, familiar in discussions of divine omnipresence,[48] allows the relationalist to hold that space, while not reducible to objects and their relations, is nonetheless derivative with respect to them. It is because of such objects and relations that space exists as a thing. If space is a derivative reality, then one can proceed on the assumption that one's ontology includes regions of space.

But do the accounts given commit us even to that much? Parsons reflects,

> The theory of location has a striking prima facie ontological commitment: it is substantivalist, and in this it reflects the ordinary way we talk about places and times. . . . Though we talk this way, however, many of us are worried about the ontological commitment to places and times – are there really such things? If so, what are they like? If not, how can we understand talk that is apparently about them?[49]

[45] Hudson, "Omnipresence," 199.
[46] Hudson, 199.
[47] In a footnote he says that "Theorists other than relationalists can give the second dismissive answer, too, so long as they do not include regions in their ontology (i.e., so long as like the relationalists they do not take spacetime to be an independent *thing* partially filled or occupied by other entities)" (Hudson, "Omnipresence," 213). I do not see why including spacetime in one's ontology requires that it be an independent rather than derivative thing.
[48] See, e.g., Richard Cross, "Duns Scotus on Divine Immensity," *Faith and Philosophy* 33, no. 4 (2016): 390, who clearly distinguishes reductive and derivative accounts of omnipresence. On a derivative account, God may be spatially located in virtue of other relations, e.g., causal relations, in which he stands to things, whereas on a reductive account God's standing in those other relations just is his being omnipresent. Blurring the distinction is Matthew James Collier, "Against the Fundamental-Reading of Anselm's Account of Omnipresence," *Heythrop Journal* 62, no. 4 (2021): 680–690.
[49] Parsons, "Theories of Location," 225.

Parsons suggests that we could avoid the apparent commitment to substantivalism by adopting some form of relationalism: we may say that "the formalism of the theory of location is metaphysically misleading, precisely because of its commitment to times and places."[50] In dealing with talk about regions of space and relations to them, he says, "Presumably the relationalist, at some point, is going to give a paraphrase of location talk into something relationalistically acceptable – some language not ontologically committed to regions of space."[51] Certainly that would be a worthwhile endeavor, but is it really necessary? The demand for a paraphrase ought to alert us to the implicit assumption of a neo-Quinean criterion of ontological commitment which we have already seen reason to reject.[52] Absent that criterion, there is no need to give the sentences of our account a metaphysically heavyweight reading and so no need to search for a paraphrase. Similarly for parts of objects: we can avoid the Doctrine of Arbitrary Undetached Parts by eschewing a metaphysically heavyweight reading of our formulations.[53] Thus, the theory of ubiquitous entension need not commit its adherent to substantivalism about space.

8.3 Historical Representatives of Omnispatiality

We saw in our discussion of divine eternity that Sir Isaac Newton believed that God exists omnispatially, constituting and filling absolute space and time by his very existing. Newton is usually considered to be out of the mainstream of traditional Christian theology in this regard. But intellectual historian Robert Pasnau has made the startling claim that divine omnispatiality represents in fact the mainstream Christian position.[54] He maintains that historically Christian theologians have universally believed that God is wholly present at every place in space and therefore exists throughout space.

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[50] Parsons, 226. Hayden Stephan contrasts Parsons' perspective in this respect with Hudson's: "Parsons just wants to provide a formal framework for locational ascriptions, but he is less concerned with grounding metaphysical facts; I believe this is why he acknowledges a relationalist treatment. But Hudson's theory is supposed to be metaphysically substantive – 'heavyweight', if you will – because he is concerned with what fundamentally grounds locative facts like omnipresence" (Hayden Stephan, personal communication to William Lane Craig, August 23, 2021).

[51] Parsons, "Theories of Location," 210.

[52] See *supra,* 73, 86–100.

[53] Parsons himself rejects the principle of arbitrary partition, which says that every object has a part exactly located in each region it pervades (Parsons, "Theories of Location," 211). That enables him to avoid ontological commitment to arbitrary undetached parts. On a lightweight reading talk of spatial points also does not exclude the reality of a space which is not composed of points but can be divided into ever smaller intervals.

[54] Robert Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes 1274–1671* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011). Pasnau is followed in this claim by Ross Inman, "Omnipresence and the Location of the Immaterial," in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Jonathan L. Kvanvig (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 8: 167–206.

This belief is evidently the same conviction underlying contemporary theories of divine omnispatiality, whether entension, spanning, non-maximal location, or intersection. Borrowing a neologism coined by Newton's predecessor Henry More, Pasnau calls such a view holenmerism, which means literally "whole-in-part-ism." Something is said to exist holenmerically just in case it exists "wholly at each place where it exists. . . . if a thing exists holenmerically then it does not have proper integral parts: the 'part' of it that exists at any sub-region would be the whole of it."[55] Thus, in holenmerism the "whole" denotes the occupying substance and the "part" the region of space that is occupied. Pasnau asserts, "Holenmerism is the standard view regarding immaterial entities – God, angels, and rational souls – from Plotinus, Augustine, and Anselm all the way through the scholastic era. Nearly all the leading scholastic authors embrace this position, including Bonaventure, Aquinas, Scotus, Ockham, and Buridan."[56] Unfortunately, apart from providing, without comment, a list of references,[57] Pasnau does little to support this claim for patristic and medieval thinkers. Since such theologians are traditionally thought to have conceived God to be both timeless and spaceless, Pasnau's claim, if correct, would force a radical reinterpretation of such thinkers.[58] Pasnau's claim therefore merits examination with respect to some representative theologians.

In interpreting the views of premodern theologians concerning divine omnipresence, we are confronted with the same difficulty that we encountered with respect to divine simplicity, namely, their statements in this regard

[55] Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes*, 337.

[56] Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes,* 337. "Medieval Christian authors, despite being generally misread on this point, are in complete agreement that God is literally present, spatially, throughout the universe. . . . the universally accepted view was that God exists holenmerically throughout space, wholly existing at each place in the universe" (Robert Pasnau, "On Existing All at Once," in *God, Eternity, and Time*, ed. Christian Tapp and Edmund Runggaldier [Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011], 19).

[57] On the holenmeric existence of immaterial entities, he references Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.2.1; Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity* VI.6.8; John of Damascus, *The Orthodox Faith* XIII.3; Anselm, *Monologion* 20–23; Anselm, *Proslogion* XIII; Bonaventure, *Commentary on the Sentences* I.8.2.3; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.8.2 ad 3; Ia.76.8; John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* II.2.2.1–2; William Ockham, *Quodlibeta* I.12; William Ockham, *Tractatus de corpore Christi* chap. VII; Jean Buridan, *Questions on the "De anima"* II.7; III.4; III.17; Nicholas Oresme, *De anima* II.4; III.4; Francisco Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae* 51.4.2; Francisco Suárez, *De anima* 2.8; *In summam theologiam* pt. I, tract. 3 (*De anima*), I.13.13; I.14.9–10. These references are a very mixed bag, some of them having to do, not with God's existence, but with the way in which the soul exists in the body. Plotinus' One, for example, which is beyond being, cannot possibly exist spatially. Similarly, the references to Augustine and Bonaventure have to do primarily with the soul, not with God. St. John Damascene speaks of God's being wholly present everywhere in terms of God's universal operation at every place. We shall have more to say of Anselm and Aquinas shortly.

[58] Pasnau does not shy from indicting fellow scholars for their failure to understand medieval thinkers: "Modern theologians have spectacularly misunderstood medieval views in this domain. The mainstream of medieval Christian thought does not remove God from space and time, but rather invokes holochronic and holenmeric existence so that a simple, immutable being can nevertheless exist in all places and all times" (Pasnau, "Existing All at Once," 21). He might as well have included the wide majority of medievalists, philosophers, and intellectual historians in his indictment.

are frustratingly ambiguous and therefore open to various interpretations. Consider, preeminently, the claim that God is wholly present everywhere. This claim was universally accepted, since God, being incorporeal, is not composed of physical parts. Therefore divine pertension throughout space was out of the question. This conclusion appears *prima facie* to provide support for divine omnispatiality, until one asks what, exactly, is meant by being "wholly present." It turns out that such an expression is ambiguous and may mean that God governs or operates at every place in space, which is consistent with divine aspatiality.

For example, in his *Divine Institutes* VII the early fourth century theologian Lactantius takes aim at Stoic thinkers who conceived of God as the mind of the world and the world as the body of God, in contrast to Platonists who held that the world was created by God and governed by him. Repudiating Virgil's statement that "Mind spread through all the limbs impels the entire mass and mingles itself in the vast body," Lactantius says, "If he made the world, he existed without it. If he rules it, he does so not as mind rules the body, but as a master rules a house, a driver a chariot, that is, as not mixed up with the things they rule." Here Lactantius explicitly rejects the soul's presence in the body as an analogy for divine omnipresence. God transcends creation and is not mingled with it, ruling it rather like the master of a house or a charioteer. He thinks that divine holenmerism would have the objectionable implication that the world is God's body. He therefore maintains that the Stoics "have not understood that the divine spirit is diffused everywhere and holds all things together, but not in such a way that the incorrupt God himself is mingled with the solid corruptible elements."

Similarly, St. John Damascene, while affirming, "the Divinity is without parts and . . . is wholly everywhere in his entirety, not being physically distributed part for part, but wholly in all things and wholly over the universe," had previously explained that "He, who fills all things and is over all things and himself encompasses all things, is his own place. However, God is also said to be in a place; and this place where God is said to be is there where his operation is plainly visible."[59] Since God is said to be his own place though operative in various places, Damascene is naturally understood to mean that God transcends space but is operative everywhere in space and in that sense wholly present at every place.

[59] John of Damascus, *The Orthodox Faith* I.13. He proceeds to contrast God with an angel who in virtue of being entirely located in a particular place "cannot act in different places at the same time, because only God can act everywhere at the same time. For the angel acts in different places by virtue of a natural swiftness and his ability to pass without delay, that is, swiftly, from place to place; but the Divinity being everywhere and beyond all at the same time acts in different places by one simple operation."

Statements by classical theologians to the effect that God is not "contained" in any place appear *prima facie* to provide support for divine aspatiality, for an omnispatial God would pervade and be wholly present in various spatial subregions and thus be contained by them. But it is possible that in denying that God is contained in any place, theologians may have meant merely that, in contemporary parlance, God is not entirely located at any spatial subregion. Since he is located not just in one subregion but in disjoint subregions as well, he is not contained, that is, restricted, to one. This interpretation does not tell the whole story, however, since an omnispatial God is (unless one embraces non-maximal location) still entirely located in the maximal region of space and, hence, contained there. It is not as though theologians thought that space is embedded in some hyperspace, enabling God to exist both in and beyond three-dimensional space.

Brian Leftow has advised that "Treatments of omnipresence should distinguish its *nature* (what it is to be omnipresent), *cause* (what makes God omnipresent) and *manner* (the kind of presence God has everywhere)."[60] We may hope to resolve some of these questions by reading specific texts within the larger theological context of a theologian's thought and by reading the crucial passages carefully in their literary context rather than snatching at phrases. As biblical interpreters are all too aware, if an interpreter comes to a text with a particular interpretation firmly in mind, then the text can often be read in a manner consistent with that interpretation; nonetheless, such an interpretation may not be the most natural and plausible reading of the text.

8.3.1 Augustine

Consider, then, Augustine, whom proponents of divine omnispatiality would claim as one of their own. Augustine's most relevant statements on divine omnipresence come in his letter to Claudius Dardanus that Augustine later entitled "The Presence of God." Inman thinks that "Perhaps the clearest statement of Augustine's positive view of divine omnipresence" is the following passage:[61]

> On this account is he said to be everywhere, because he is absent to no part; on this account is he said to be whole, because he presents not one part of himself to a part of things, and another part of himself to another part of things, equal part to equal parts of things, a less to lesser parts,

[60] Brian Leftow, "Omnipresence," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig (London: Routledge, 1998), 7:103–107 (my emphasis).
[61] Inman, "Omnipresence," 185.

> greater to a greater part; but he is equally present as a whole not only to the whole of the universe, but also to each part of it.[62]

Alas, however, this passage is attended by the very ambiguity of which we have just spoken. It amounts merely to a rejection of divine ubiquitous pertension in favor of God's being wholly present everywhere, but it leaves unexplained the way in which God is wholly present to every part of the universe.

We can come to a clearer understanding of Augustine's doctrine by considering the wider theological context of his view of God's relationship to space and time. Augustine's doctrine of divine omnipresence is shaped by Plotinus' treatment of what he called "the presence of Being, one and the same, everywhere as a whole" [*to on hen kai tauton on hama pantaxou einai holon*].[63] Plotinus insists that the All (*to pan*) is not contained in anything but, on the contrary, contains all things. "There exist certainly both the true All and the representation of the All, the nature of this visible universe. The really existent All is in nothing: for there is nothing before it. But that which comes after it must necessarily then exist in the All, if it is going to exist at all, being as much as possible dependent on it."[64] As we saw in our discussion of divine simplicity, the priority of the All is ontological, not temporal, in that it is the source of the universe. Though the All is said to contain all things, Plotinus emphasizes that the true All (or in MacKenna's translation the Authentic All) (*to alēthinon pan*) is not some sort of spatial container of the universe:

> We may be reminded that the universe cannot be contained in the Authentic as in a place, where place would mean the boundaries of some surrounding extension considered as an envelope, or some space formerly a part of the Void and still remaining unoccupied even after the emergence of the universe, that it can only support itself, as it were, upon the Authentic and rest in the embrace of its omnipresence; but this objection is merely verbal and will disappear if our meaning is grasped; we mention it for another purpose; it goes to enforce our real assertion that the

[62] Augustine, *Letters* 187.17. I cite Inman's translation to convey the clarity he perceives.

[63] Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.4–5. Unless otherwise noted, translation is from Armstrong's edition (Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. A. H. Armstrong, 7 vols. [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984]). Lloyd Gerson takes what Plotinus calls the true All to be "the intelligible world (i.e., Being) which is cognitively identical with Intellect" or *Noûs* (Lloyd Gerson, personal communication to William Lane Craig, Sept. 20, 2021). For Plotinus, "everything is 'in' the One in the sense that everything depends on it. What Plotinus is denying in VI 4, 2, is that Intellect-Being is 'in' anything in the sense of a container that would limit its ambit or 'reach'. Intellect-Being reaches all the way 'down' to matter. The One alone reaches matter since everything that has being in any way depends ultimately on the One."

[64] Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.4.2.

> Authentic All, at once primal and veritable, needs no place and is in no way contained. The All, as being an integral, cannot fall short of itself; it must ever have fulfilled its own totality, ever reached to its own equivalence; as far as the sum of entities extends, there this is; for this is the All.[65]

It is precisely the All's transcendence of space that enables it to be present to all things in space rather than to extend part by part throughout space:

> One should also not be amazed if the [true] universe [*to alēthinon pan*], while not being in place, is present to everything that is in place. The contrary would be amazing, in fact, not just amazing, but impossible, if it also had its own place and were present to something else that was in place, or was present wholly, namely, in the way we say it is present. As things are, the argument asserts that it is necessary for it, since it has occupied no place, to be wholly present to anything it is present to, and to be present to all just as it is also wholly present to each. If this is not so, part of it will be here and part elsewhere. The result is that it will be divisible and a body.[66]

The true All is not only spaceless but timeless: "It is not like a stone, some vast block lying where it lies, covering the space of its own extension, held within its own limits, having a fixed quantity of mass and of assigned stone-power. It is a First Principle, measureless, not bounded within determined size – such measurement belongs to another order – and therefore it is all-power, nowhere under limit. Being so, it is outside of Time."[67] Plotinus makes use of theological language when he says, "there is That Other whom the cities seek, and all the earth and heaven, everywhere with God and in Him, possessing through Him their Being and the Real Beings about them, down to soul and life, all bound to Him and so moving to that unity which by its very lack of extension is infinite (*eis hen apeiron ionta amegethei tō apeirō*)."[68] The idea of all things' existing in God and being contained by him especially resonated with Christian thinkers in light of the scriptural affirmation that "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17.28). Leftow therefore quite rightly reminds us that "The availability since Plotinus of non-spatial uses of 'in' and 'contain'

[65] Plotinus, VI.4.2. MacKenna's translation, in Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (New York: Larson Publications, 1992).
[66] Plotinus, VI.4.3. Gerson's translation.
[67] Plotinus, VI.5.11. MacKenna's translation.
[68] Plotinus, VI.5.12. MacKenna's translation.

cautions us in reading the apparently spatial language of later treatments of omnipresence."[69]

How, then, is the true All present to all things? Plotinus answers: By being the source of their being; things participate in the All and so have their being:

> Now if this is real being and remains the same and does not depart from itself and there is no coming-to-be about it and, as was said, it is not in place, it is necessary for it, being in this state, to be always with itself, and not to stand away from itself; one part of it cannot be here and another there, nor can anything come out of it; [for if it did] it would already be in different places, and, in general, would be in something and not on its own or unaffected; for it would be affected if it was in something else; but if it is going to be in a state of freedom from affection, it will not be in something else. If, therefore, without departing from itself or being divided into parts or itself undergoing any change, it is in many things at once, existing at the same time as one whole with itself, then, being the same everywhere, it will have an existence in many things: but this is being on its own and, again, not being on its own. It remains, then, to say that it is itself in nothing, but the other things participate in it, all those which are able to be present to it and in so far as they are able to be present to it.[70]

It would be a self-contradiction for the true Being both to exist on its own as an impassible unity and to exist in many sensible things in space; therefore, it literally exists in nothing. It is present to all things in that they participate in it as the source of their being.

Return now to Augustine's view of divine omnipresence. God's relationship to space is analogous to his relationship to time. Firmly committed to a tensed theory of time and the objectivity of temporal becoming,[71] Augustine could not allow that God exists wholly at every successive time, for that would make him subject to temporal becoming, which was theologically unacceptable. Therefore God exists timelessly. But then how can God, existing timelessly, be present to things that do not yet or no longer exist in time? He writes to Simplician:

> What then is foreknowledge, if not knowledge of the future? But what becoming is there in God, who transcends all time? If then God's

[69] Leftow, "Omnipresence." Leftow notes that "Augustine brought Plotinus' views into Christian thought, taking over Plotinus' general account of omnipresence, his argument about the soul's presence in the body, and his analogies of light and sound."

[70] Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.5.3.

[71] See Augustine *Confessions* 11.14–19. See discussion in my *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez,* Studies in Intellectual History 7 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 73–78.

> knowledge possesses the things themselves, they are not for him future but present. It follows that one may not in this case speak of foreknowledge, but simply knowledge. But if things which will exist do not yet exist for him anymore than for creatures in the temporal order, but he foreknows them by his knowledge, then he apprehends them in two ways: on the one hand, via foreknowledge of future things and on the other via knowledge of present things. Therefore something temporal would be added to God's knowledge, which is both utterly absurd and utterly false.[72]

If temporal creatures themselves, which undergo temporal becoming, were successively present to God, then an element of temporality would be introduced into God. Given his tensed view of time, Augustine will not allow that temporal creatures are all tenselessly present to God in eternity. Therefore, he is led to deny the assumption that "God's knowledge possesses the things themselves." Rather, following Plotinus, for whom the immediate cognitive object of the *Noûs* is the realm of intelligible essences that constitute the archetypes for particulars in time and space, so that the *Noûs* possesses changelessly and timelessly knowledge of all things past, present, and future,[73] Augustine declares:

> the ideas are certain original and principal forms of things, i.e., reasons, fixed and unchangeable, which are not themselves formed and, being thus eternal and existing always in the same state, are contained in the Divine Intelligence. And though they themselves never come into being and pass away, nevertheless, everything which can come into being and pass away and everything which does come into being and pass away is said to be formed in accord with these ideas.
>
> . . . if these reasons of all things to be created or [already] created are contained in the Divine Mind, and if there can be in the Divine Mind nothing except what is eternal and unchangeable . . . then not only are they ideas, but they are themselves true because they are eternal and because they remain ever the same and unchangeable. It is by participation in these that whatever is exists in whatever manner it does exist.[74]

According to Augustine the divine archetypal ideas not only served as the pattern for creation, but even after the creation serve as the medium

[72] Augustine, *On Diverse Questions to Simplician* II.2.2.27–36.
[73] Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.1.4.
[74] Augustine, *Eighty-Three Different Questions* XLVI.2.21–32, 53–64.

by which God knows his creatures.[75] Hence, it is not the creatures themselves which are timelessly present to God's knowledge but their archetypal ideas.[76]

But then if by "wholly present" to things or places in space, Augustine meant that God exists in space, divine timelessness would be immediately sacrificed. Not only would temporal creatures, rather than their ideas, then be present to God, but God would be enmeshed in temporal becoming as things around him constantly come into being and pass away. He, too, would be constantly changing, not only in his relations to things around him, but also in his knowledge of what is co-located with him, thereby sacrificing immutability as well as timelessness. It is highly implausible that a thinker so exercised by God's relationship to time as Augustine would have been oblivious to such an evident incoherence in his view and never thought to address it.

The only hope for Augustine of preserving divine timelessness would be maintaining divine spacelessness as well. In that case, God's being wholly present to things in space is plausibly not a relation that involves God's being in space. And in his letter to Dardanus, is this not exactly what we find? Augustine's point of departure is Dardanus' question concerning Jesus' whereabouts between his death and resurrection. Augustine's short answer is that "Christ, as God, is always everywhere."[77] Notice that just as Augustine states that God is everywhere, he also affirms that God is always everywhere, that is, everywhere at every time, even though he thinks that God exists timelessly.[78] This fact warns us not to assume too quickly that he means that God is located in every place. Augustine previews his fuller answer when he says of Christ, "He is the power and wisdom of God, of which scripture says that it stretches from end to end mightily and arranges all things pleasingly (Wis 8:1) and reaches everywhere on account of its

[75] Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* V.14–19

[76] Coelestin Zimara summarizes,

> "Augustine never grounds . . . a constant *praesentia* of creatures to God's knowledge. . . in the thought of a constant coexistence of God with every instant of the flow of time and of the temporally transpiring being of things outside of God. He speaks of a continuing presence of things and events before the knowing God, but means more precisely thereby merely the unchangeable and eternal presence of the divine '*rationes*' of things and events.
>
> . . . in the final analysis Augustine understands by the eternal presence of things to God's knowledge exclusively the eternal presence of the divine ideas thereof. . .." (Coelestin Zimara, "Die Eigenart des göttlichen Vorherwissens nach Augustinus," *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie and Theologie* 1 [1954]: 389, 392; cf. Joseph van Gerven, "Liberté humaine et prescience divine d'après saint Augustin," *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 55 [1957]: 321).

[77] Augustine, *Letters* 187.7.

[78] Similarly, in a sermon that Inman quotes in support of divine spatiality *chez* Augustine, Augustine says to his parishoners, "You too, I mean, are the whole of you in your house and the whole of you here in church; but when you're in church you are not in your house; when you're in your house, you are not in church. So it's not the same with him . . . the whole of him is everywhere simultaneously" (Augustine, *Sermons* 277). Being timeless, God is not literally everywhere simultaneously; is he nonetheless literally everywhere?

purity, and nothing impure is found in it (Wis 7:24–25)."[79] Here we find an appeal to God's power and wisdom, so far-reaching in their consequences, as a basis of divine omnipresence.

Augustine then launches into a fairly lengthy critique of divine pertension, commenting, "when we say that God is everywhere, we . . . do not suppose that God is spread out through all things as if by spacial [*sic*] magnitude in the same way that the earth, or a liquid, or air, or this light is spread out."[80] He draws an analogy with various qualities like wisdom and immortality and health, which are equally possessed by a composite body in whole and in part. He then exclaims, "Heaven forbid that the substance of the creator is incapable of what a quality of a created body is capable of."[81] God, too, can be wholly present in part and in whole.

Interestingly, Augustine nowhere in this letter appeals to the analogy of the soul's being wholly present in every part of the body. Nonetheless, Inman, taking his cue from Pasnau, thinks that God's entending throughout space is but one instance of a more general principle, namely, that immaterial entities, in contrast to material entities, are located in space by means of entension. Inman says,

> Augustine situates the distinct ways in which the soul and body are located in space within a more comprehensive view of the material–immaterial divide, one that is characterized at least in part by the capacity for distinct ways of being located in space. Like all material objects, the body is located at a place by being partly located at every part of that place; in the parlance of contemporary metaphysics, the body *pertends* in space. Being immaterial, the human soul is located at a place by being, "whole in the whole and whole also in any part of the body" (*On the Trinity*, 6.2.8); in contrast to material beings, the soul *entends* in space.[82]

Apart from the fact that Augustine does not draw this analogy in treating divine omnipresence, there are two problems with pressing the analogy to illuminate the nature of God's omnipresence. First, while Augustine affirms that God is wholly present everywhere in the universe and that the soul is wholly present throughout the body, it is not clear that God is for that reason spatially located. The point of the analogy is whole presence, not spatiality. God and the soul could be similar in being wholly present to

[79] Augustine, *Letter* 187.7.
[80] Augustine, 187.11.
[81] Augustine, 187.13.
[82] Inman, "Omnipresence," 184.

things in space without God's being spatially located.[83] Second, it is by no means clear that even the soul, in virtue of being wholly present throughout the body, is spatially located. In another letter Augustine says, "For [the soul] pervades the whole body which it animates, not by a local distribution of parts, but by a certain vital influence, being at the same moment present in its entirety in all parts of the body and not less in smaller parts and greater in larger parts, but here with more energy and there with less energy, it is in its entirety present in the whole body and in every part of it."[84] This appears to be an analysis of the soul's being wholly in the body, not in terms of spatial extension, but in terms of power and influence.[85]

In Letter 187, Augustine concludes, "Hence God is spread out through all things" and quotes several Scriptures in support. Entension theorists delight in these sections of the letter, but in fact all they aim to prove is the falsity of divine pertension. Tellingly, Augustine proceeds to explicate his claim that "God is spread out through all things" by saying, "But God is spread out through all things not such that he is a quality of the world but such that he is the substance that creates the world, rules it without any toil, and contains it without any burden."[86] Here the content of the expression "spread out" is explicated, not in terms of spatial location, but in terms of God's creating, ruling, and effortlessly containing all things.

What does it mean to say that God contains all things? – once more, the ambiguity! Augustine says that God is "contained in no place, but whole everywhere in himself."[87] He later feels obliged to explain this odd locution "in himself," asking, "For how is he everywhere if he is in himself? He is everywhere, of course, because he is absent nowhere. But he is in himself because he is not contained by those things to which he is present, as if he could not exist without them."[88] The idea here seems to be that God considered in and of himself exists *a se* and so is not dependent upon space for his existence. Take away space, and bodies could not exist; take away bodies, and their qualities could not exist; but take away space, and God would still exist. *Pari passu*, God can be said to contain all things in that if one were to

[83] Stephan also draws attention to the fact that Augustine speaks of the whole presence of immaterial objects to things in space, not to space itself. "To arrive at the position that immaterial objects such as God and souls occupy regions of space, one needs something like the following bridge premise: if an immaterial object M is present to a material object N and N is located at spatial region R, then M is located at R. But as far as I can tell, Augustine does not seem to assume this premise, nor does he seem to endorse the implication that God and souls are in space" (Hayden Stephan, personal communication to William Lane Craig, August 2021).
[84] Augustine, *Letters* 166.2.4.
[85] A point made more generally by Georg Gasser, "God's Omnipresence in the World: On Possible Meanings of 'en' in Panentheism," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 85 (2019): 56–57.
[86] Augustine, *Letters* 187.14.
[87] Augustine, 187.14.
[88] Augustine, 187.18.

take away God, nothing would exist! As we saw in our discussion of divine simplicity, for Augustine, as for Plotinus, creatures have their being by participation in God.

Augustine goes on to deny both temporal and spatial extension of God. A sound "is equally present to all in the place where they are," even if people's subjective perceptions are different. "How much more excellently is God, an incorporeal and immutably living nature, *who cannot be extended and divided like a sound over stretches of time* and *who does not need an airy space in which to make himself present to others* but, remaining in himself in his eternal stability, able to be present to all things in his totality and to individual things in his totality."[89] Here Augustine draws together God's relations to both time and space. God is not temporally extended and divisible into temporal parts but, as we have seen, exists timelessly. God does not need space (much less air) in order to be present to other things in space. Since physical things could not exist without space, Augustine must mean that God need not himself be in space in order to be present to things in space. He exists in himself timelessly and spacelessly and is wholly present to things, as already said, by his power and wisdom.

Augustine is admittedly not as clear as we should like. Some of his statements, when taken out of context, sound like an affirmation of some sort of ubiquitous entension. But when Augustine's statements are read in their theological and literary context, then the most natural and plausible interpretation of his doctrine is that God exists timelessly and spacelessly and is wholly present to things in space by causing and knowing them.

8.3.2 Anselm

Proponents of divine spatiality have also claimed St. Anselm as one of their own.[90] Certainly there are passages in Anselm which, when read in isolation, can be interpreted as affirming divine omnispatiality (and divine omnitemporality!). But is that the most plausible construal of these passages? It is of no value merely to quote "proof texts" affirming that God is wholly present at every place and time, for given the biblical witness to divine omnipresence and incorporeality, all parties agree that it is unthinkable that God might be absent from any place or time or partially present at any place or time. Rather the relevant Anselmian texts require careful exegesis.

[89] Augustine, 187.19.

[90] Pasnau, "Existing All at Once," 19–21; Inman, "Omnipresence," 18–25; Christopher H. Conn, "Anselmian Spacetime: Omnipresence and the Created Order," *Heythrop Journal* 52, no. 2 (2011): 260–270.

It is noteworthy that while an examination of Augustine's view of divine omnipresence required us to look at the broader theological context of his discussion of divine eternity, Anselm explicitly links together God's relations to space and time.[91] In Anselm's mind either God is spatial and temporal or else aspatial and atemporal; he will not allow for a timeless God who occupies space or for a spaceless God who persists through time.

Anselm's most important discussion of God's relations to space and time may be found in his *Monologion* 20–22, where he engages in a dialectical discussion of God's relations to space and time in which he argues, first, that God "exists in every place and time" (20), second, that God "exists in no place or time" (21), and finally, that God "exists in every place and time and in no place or time" (22). Obviously, Anselm delights in paradox, to the befuddlement of his interpreters! Anselm thinks that in one sense God exists in space and time but in another sense he does not. The interpreter's challenge is to discern those different senses. Traditionally, Anselm has been understood to affirm that God exists spacelessly and timelessly but that he is present always and everywhere in the sense that he is causally connected to every place and time.[92] But some contemporary interpreters maintain that Anselm thought that God does exist in space and, presumably, time but that he is not in any place or time in the sense that he is not confined to any particular place and time. The question is which of these interpretations more plausibly represents Anselm's view.

In this exchange *sic et non*, the most important statements for discerning Anselm's view will come with the resolution in (22). But the earlier phases of the dialectic merit our scrutiny as well. Anselm leads off his discussion by summarizing, "Now it was concluded above that this creating nature exists everywhere and in all things and through all things, and that, from the fact that he neither came into existence nor will cease to exist, it follows that he always was and is and will be."[93] But if we take that statement at face value, then any further argument in chapter 20 is superfluous; the thesis of divine omnispatiality and omnitemporality is established. The fact that the discussion does not end there leads one to suspect that the statement is not straightforward.

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[91] Collier unfortunately ignores the immediate context of Anselm's remarks in favor of the broader context of Anselm's perfect being theology, arguing that divine spatiality would be incompatible with plausible assumptions of perfect being theology (Collier, "Against the Fundamental-Reading," 687–688). But only one of Collier's identified assumptions is explicitly affirmed by Anselm, so that his argument is interpretively weak.

[92] See, e.g., Thomas Williams, "Saint Anselm," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Winter 2020 Edition), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/anselm.

[93] Anselm, *Monologion* XX.

In fact, when we examine the earlier chapters, it is not clear that such a thesis has been established. In chapter 13 Anselm argues that God not only initially created all things from nothing but also sustains them in being, concluding, "just as nothing was made except through the presence of the creating essence, so nothing remains in existence except through his conserving presence."[94] Here God's presence seems to be equated with his causal power or activity – after all, in creating all things out of nothing God was not spatially present. But then, when Anselm says at the beginning of chapter 14, "it follows that where he does not exist, nothing exists. Therefore, he exists everywhere, both through all things and in all things," he either is guilty of a *non sequitur* or, more plausibly, is not using words like "everywhere" to designate God's spatial location but rather his creative presence. Indeed, Anselm suggests that the "Creator and Sustainer. . . go[es] beyond the totality of the things he has made. It is therefore clear that he undergirds and transcends, that he encompasses and penetrates all other things."[95] This sort of language makes no sense if God occupies space as a whole – unless, that is, one posits a hyperspace in which our space is embedded that God also occupies![96]

As for Anselm's claim to have established that God "always was and is and will be," this claim harks back to chapter 18, where Anselm argues that God "exists without beginning and without end."[97] It hardly needs to be said that such a thesis is not equivalent to the claim that God always was and is and will be, nor does Anselm present any argument that God's being beginningless and endless implies his sempiternal existence. So once more, Anselm either is guilty of an evident *non-sequitur*, or, more plausibly, does not mean that God literally endures through time. Intriguingly, he reflects, "if God has a beginning or end he is not true eternity."[98] But if "eternal" means "omnitemporal," a God who exists at all times always exists and so is eternal even if he has a beginning or an end, just as a God who is omnispatial exists everywhere and so is omnipresent even if space is closed and finite in extent. As we shall see, Anselm is plausibly interpreted to mean that God transcends time, though sustaining temporal creatures in existence.

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[94] Anselm, *Monologion* XIII. That Anselm means to affirm temporal *creatio ex nihilo* is evident from *Monologion* VII–VIII.

[95] Anselm, 14.

[96] Precisely the extravagance to which Brian Leftow is driven, which he calls "Anselmian superspace" (Brian Leftow, "Anselm on Omnipresence," *New Scholasticism* 63, no. 3 [1989]: 353–354). Such an anachronism does not represent a credible exegesis of Anselm. For a similarly anachronistic claim that Anselm advocated four-dimensional spacetime realism, along with a tenseless theory of time, see Conn, "Anselmian Spacetime," 267–268. Conn does not seem to appreciate the incompatibility of a tenseless theory of time with Anselm's admitted commitment to our being enduring entities (264).

[97] Anselm, *Monologion* XVIII.

[98] Anselm, 18.

Returning to chapter 20, we find Anselm immediately expressing reservations about his misleading statements that God exists everywhere and always was and is and will be. "I feel," he says, "the rumblings of a contradiction, which compels me to investigate more carefully where and when he exists."[99] He proceeds to present a trilemma: God "exists either everywhere and always, or merely somewhere and sometimes, or nowhere and never."[100] One should expect Anselm to pick the third option on the grounds that God exists atemporally and aspatially. Instead, he presents two objections to the third option. First, it is absurd that the Supreme Being exists nowhere and never. Second, if God exists nowhere and never, then absolutely everything exists nowhere and never, since everything depends upon God for its existence.[101] The problem is that, as Pasnau admits, these arguments are lame.[102] Obviously, affirming God's transcendence of space and time does not imply his non-existence, and Anselm must have realized this.[103] In short, in the dialectic thus far, only weak arguments have been offered on behalf of God's literally existing in every place and time and, hence, against divine aspatiality.

In chapter 21 Anselm turns to a discussion of ways in which God might exist spatially and temporally. Here he presents a dilemma concerning divine omnispatiality: either God "exists as a whole in every place or time, or only part of him does."[104] In contemporary parlance, Anselm is contrasting divine entension/intersection with divine pertension with respect to space as well as divine endurance with divine perdurance with respect to time. Divine pertension and perdurance are immediately ruled out as incompatible with divine simplicity: "if he partly exists and partly does not exist in every place or time, he has parts, which is false."[105] Since God cannot have parts correlated with each individual place and time, he must exist "as a whole even in each individual place and time."[106]

Now Anselm, to his credit, discerns a disanalogy of space to time which makes assessment of the proposal difficult. While it is conceptually

[99] Anselm, 20.
[100] Anselm, 20.
[101] Similarly, if God exists at only some places and times, then nothing exists at those places and times where he does not exist. Anselm rejects the rejoinder that God could exist at only some places and times and by his power sustain things in places and times where he is not, for his power in no way exists apart from him. Partisans of divine spatiality might take heart at this apparent rejection of God's presence's being construed as his causal power; but in fact Anselm does not deny that God's power would suffice for God's presence; he denies only that God's power is separable from him. His power and presence go together.
[102] Pasnau, "Existing All at Once," 22.
[103] Cf. his discussion of *creatio ex nihilo*, where "from nothing" does not mean that God did not create (Anselm, *Monologion* VIII).
[104] Anselm, 21.
[105] Anselm, 21.
[106] Anselm, 21.

coherent to speak of God's existing as a whole at every place in space either "all at once or at different times," that is, simultaneously or place by place consecutively, what can be meant by saying that God exists as a whole at every moment of time either "all at once or at different times (*aut simul aut per diversa temporis*)"?[107] Since "all at once" means at the same time, it is incoherent, barring hypertime, to say that God exists at every time at the same time. The proper parallel to existing at every place at the same time would be existing at every time at the same place,[108] that is to say, being immobile throughout all time, which is certainly not Anselm's interest! An endurantist account of temporal persistence holds that God exists wholly at every time consecutively and, hence, at different times. But it remains to be seen what sense can be given to the idea that God exists at all times at once. So Anselm says that he must treat the spatial and temporal cases separately. But, as we shall see, the two soon become entangled.

Consider, first, divine entension/intersection, whether God can exist wholly at every place at the same time. Anselm objects:

> if he exists as a whole in individual places, individual wholes exist in individual places. For just as one place is distinct from another place, in such a way that they are individual places, what exists as a whole in one place is distinct from what at the same time exists as a whole in another place, in such a way that they are individual wholes. For if something exists as a whole in a given place, there is nothing of that thing that does not exist in that place. Now if there is nothing of a thing that does not exist in a given place, then there is nothing of that thing that exists at the same time outside that place.[109]

Based upon our discussion of location relations, we see that this argument confounds being wholly located in a place with being entirely located in a place. It is correct that if something exists as a whole in a given place, then all its parts are located at that place; none of its proper parts exists outside that place. But it does not follow that it exists entirely at that place, that there is no other place where that same thing also wholly exists. Thus, Anselm has not shown that what exists as a whole in one place is distinct from what exists as a whole in another place. So when Anselm concludes that "if the supreme nature exists as a whole at one time in all individual places, there are as many individual supreme natures as there can be

[107] Anselm, 21. Note that by contrasting "all at once" with "at different times," Anselm clearly understands (*pace* Pasnau, "Existing All at Once," 11, 23–27) "all at once" to mean *at the same time*.
[108] On parallels between space and time, see Richard Taylor, "Spatial and Temporal Analogies and the Concept of Identity," *Journal of Philosophy* 52, no. 22 (1955): 599–611.
[109] Anselm, *Monologion* XXI.

individual places,"[110] he rejects entension/intersection and, hence, divine spatiality on faulty grounds.[111]

Turn, now, to the question whether God "exists as a whole at individual times, either all at once or distinctly at individual times."[112] Immediately, Anselm discerns the incoherence mentioned above: "how does something exist as a whole at individual times all at once (*totum simul*) if those times themselves do not exist all at once?"[113] What we see here is Anselm's implicit commitment to a tensed theory of time, according to which temporal becoming is a real and objective feature of the world. A theorist of tenseless time can make sense of all times' existing at once, that is to say, tenselessly. All events and times are on an ontological par, and temporal becoming is a subjective illusion of consciousness. But Anselm will have nothing to do with such a tenseless view of time.

On the other hand, if God exists wholly at every time consecutively, then he is an enduring entity, just as we are. In that case he exists "in the way that a human being exists as a whole yesterday, today, and tomorrow, [and] it is correct to say that he existed and exists and will exist."[114] This Anselm cannot countenance: "if his eternity has a past, present, and future, it follows that his essence also has a past, present, and future,"[115] which is incompatible with divine simplicity and immutability. It follows, assuming a tensed theory of time, that God cannot exist wholly at every time either at once or successively.

The argument of chapter XXI is taken to have established that God does, after all, exist at no place or time and, therefore, nowhere and never. How is this compatible with the afore-established conclusions that God "exists through himself, without beginning and without end, but also that without him nothing exists anywhere or at any time"?[116]

Curiously, Anselm, by presenting weak arguments for divine spatiality (XX) as well as for divine aspatiality (XXI), has left the door open for affirming either divine spatiality or divine aspatiality. We find the resolution of these aporiae in the crucial chapter XXII. Will Anselm endorse divine spatiality/temporality or divine aspatiality/atemporality? He suggests:

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[110] Anselm, XXI.
[111] He also rejects the idea that God exists wholly in every place at successive times, i.e., that God is moving about in space and so absent from some places at a given time.
[112] Anselm, XXI.
[113] Anselm, XXI.
[114] Anselm, XXI.
[115] Anselm, XXI.
[116] Anselm, XXI.

> Perhaps the supreme nature exists in place or time in a way that does not prevent him from existing as a whole all at once in individual places or times, but so that there are not several wholes, but only one whole, and so that his life, which is nothing other than true eternity, is not divided into past, present, and future. For this law of place and time seems to constrain only those things that exist in place or time in such a way that they do not transcend the expanse of space or the duration of time. Of such things, therefore, it is most truthfully asserted that one and the same whole cannot exist as a whole all at once in different places and times.[117]

In this fascinating passage, the first sentence, taken out of context, seems to endorse divine entension. Anselm now seems to see the difference between something's being wholly located and entirely located. But such an interpretation cannot make good sense of the parallel with time nor of the remainder of the paragraph. Barring a tenseless theory of time, what sense does it make to say that God exists at once at every individual time? There is no tensed temporal analogue to spatial entension. The only solution seems to be divine timelessness. By transcending time altogether, God can be said to exist as a whole all at once (*totum simul*) at every time and so be present to every time in a sense yet to be explained. So in the remainder in the paragraph Anselm states that God is exempt from the law of place and time. What is that law? It seems to be the dictate that things that wholly exist in disjoint places simultaneously cannot be identical and that things that exist at different times have lives divided into past, present and future. Anselm takes this law to be binding upon things that exist in space and time. But, he says, "this law of place and time seems to constrain only those things that exist in place or time in such a way that they do not transcend the expanse of space or the duration of time (*ut loci spatium aut temporis diuturnitatem non excedant*)."[118] What could be clearer than this? If God were omnitemporal or omnispatial, even mysteriously extending beyond the limits of time and space, he would be bound by this law. But God exists in place and time in such a way (yet to be explained) that he transcends space and time. God can exist all at once in different times because, in the classic definition of Boethius, timeless eternity is "complete and perfect possession all at once (*tota simul*) of illimitable life."[119] "Therefore," Anselm affirms, "if he is said to exist 'always', this is best understood as meaning that he exists or lives eternally; in other words, that he enjoys illimitable life as a whole, perfectly, and all at once. For . . . what else is true eternity,

[117] Anselm, XXII.
[118] Anselm, XXII.
[119] Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy* 5 pr. 6.

which belongs to him alone, but an illimitable life existing as a whole all at once and perfectly (*interminabilis vita simul et perfecta tota*)?"[120]

Reaching further afield, we find in the *Proslogion* a decisive statement concerning God's relationship to time:

> But if by your eternity you have been, and are, and will be, and if to have been is not the same as to be in the future, and to be is not the same as to have been or to be in the future, then how does your eternity exist as a whole always?
>
> Is it that nothing of your eternity is in the past in such a way that it no longer exists, and nothing is in the future as if it did not exist already? So it is not the case that yesterday you were and tomorrow you will be; rather, yesterday, today, and tomorrow you *are*. In fact, it is not even the case that yesterday, today, and tomorrow, you *are*; rather, you *are* in an unqualified sense, outside time altogether (*sed simpliciter es extra omne tempus*).[121]

Anselm's response to the opening question is not to suggest some sort of temporal entension, that God is temporally extended without parts, for such a model would require tenseless time, which Anselm rejects.[122] Rather his response is given in the second, rhetorical question: there is no temporal becoming in divine eternity. Temporal predicates do not apply to God; rather God just is, "outside time altogether (*extra omne tempus*)."[123]

The unintelligibility of tensed temporal entension is the Achilles' Heel of the entension theoretical interpretation of divine spatiality *chez* Anselm.[124] Since Anselm binds so closely together God's relations to time and space, his belief in divine atemporality plausibly implies his belief in divine aspatiality as well.

In the *Proslogion* passage, Anselm goes on to say, "although nothing exists without you, [you] do not exist in a place or a time; rather, all things

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[120] Anselm, *Monologion* XXIV.

[121] Anselm, *Proslogion* XIX.

[122] See Gilmore, "Location and Mereology," § 6.3.2, figure 7. Cf. Pasnau, who advocates a view of God's temporal status that he dubs holochronicity, which seems to be the view contemplated by Gilmore that an entity might be tenselessly located in (space)time yet without temporal parts (Pasnau, "Existing All at Once"). Pasnau needs tenselessness in order to differentiate his account from ordinary endurance. Given its assumption of a tenseless view of time, Pasnau's view cannot reasonably be said to represent Anselm's view, as Pasnau pretends (Pasnau, 19).

[123] With his characteristic panache, Pasnau claims that "Readers have been thrown off by [Anselm's] remarks" in *Proslogion* 19, so that "their significance might be (and generally has been) missed" (Pasnau, "Existing All at Once," 21). But apart from saying that Anselm means to emphasize the unsuitability of God's being contained in a time, Pasnau makes no effort to explain what is misleading about Anselm's clear statements in the *Proslogion*.

[124] It is therefore noteworthy that both Inman and Collier neglect entirely Anselm's discussion of God's relationship to time in *Monologion* 20–22. Contrast Pasnau, whose interpretation seems committed, in spite of himself, to a tenseless view of time (Pasnau, "Existing All at Once," 19).

exist in you. For nothing contains you, but you contain all things."[125] We appear to have here a straightforward statement that God does not exist in space and time. Anselm frequently uses language about God's not being contained by any place or time. This seems to be *prima facie* incompatible with divine entension, for if God exists wholly at a place, say, in my office, then he is contained by that place, even if he is not entirely at that place. Proponents of divine entension therefore contend that for Anselm there is more to being contained than simply existing in a place. Rather it is to be confined to that place or, in contemporary parlance, to be entirely located in that place.[126] Anselm explains:

> For it seems correct to say that a thing has a place only if its quantity is circumscribed by a place that contains it and contained by a place that circumscribes it (*quantitatem locus circumscribendo continet et continendo circumscribit*), and a thing has a time only if its duration is somehow bounded by a time that measures it and measured by a time that bounds it (*diuturnitatem tempus metiendo aliquomodo terminat et terminando metitur*). Therefore, if something is such that its size or duration is not set against any boundary, whether by place or by time, no place or time properly applies to it. For since no place does to it what place does, and no time does to it what time does, we may reasonably say that no place is its place and no time is its time. Now if something is seen to have no place or time, it is certainly shown to be in no way subject to any law of place or time. Therefore, no law of place or time in any way constrains a nature that no place or time encloses in any confinement.[127]

The problem is that this characterization of what it is to be entirely in a place or to be confined to that place seems so obviously incorrect. Consider something, say, the universe or God, which is wholly and entirely located in the maximal spatial region. Whether that region is finite or infinite, it is not circumscribed by a surrounding region and therefore has no boundary in Anselm's sense. Or consider something, like the universe or God, whose duration is not enclosed within a longer temporal interval. It, too, would be in Anselm's sense unbounded. And yet, clearly, such entities do have a size or a duration that may differ indefinitely. In contemporary cosmological models these sorts of geometrical properties are determined internally

[125] Anselm, *Proslogion* 19.
[126] Inman, "Omnipresence," 21. Inman thinks that "God's failing to be 'contained by' place amounts to the claim that God, in contrast to material beings, is neither metaphysically dependent on place nor delimited by the dimensions of the places where God is located" (24). But for Anselm being contained is not a matter of dependence upon place. A material object depends upon space for its existence, but it does not depend upon its place in order to exist, for it may move about.
[127] Anselm, *Monologion* XXII.

rather than, as Anselm supposes, externally. For example, one can determine whether space is Euclidean (flat like a plane), Riemannian (positively curved like a sphere), or Lobachevskian (negatively curved like a saddle) by measuring whether the angles of an equilateral triangle sum to 180° (Euclidean), more that 180° (Riemannian), or less than 180° (Lobachevskian), without said space's being embedded in a hyperspace.

So how would being unbounded in Anselm's sense do anything to abrogate the law of place and time, such that such an entity could exist wholly in different places at the same time or exist without past, present, and future? The material universe would not in Anselm's sense exist in a place; but would the law of place and time not apply to it? Since there are for Anselm no material simples, since a material thing could be at least conceptually divided into parts, the universe pertends, not entends, in space and so cannot be wholly present in every subregion. Similarly, on a tensed view of time temporal entension makes no sense, regardless of the universe's not being temporally embedded, since there is no "at once" at which every time exists. Even a thing which fills all of time will have a past, present, and future, and so the law of place and time does apply to it.

Did all this escape Anselm? Or rather, did he offer careless definitions of "contained" but nonetheless would not have countenanced the above scenarios, instead taking the universe to have spatial parts and God to be timeless and spaceless? He proceeds to say:

> Does not every reasonable way of looking at this utterly exclude the possibility that the creating substance, supreme among all things. . . is enclosed in the confines of any place or time, since instead his power, which is nothing other than his essence, encloses all the things he made by containing them under himself? And how is it anything but shameless folly to say that any place circumscribes the size of the supreme truth, or that any time bounds his duration, since absolutely no greatness or smallness of extension in place or time applies to him?[128]

Would Anselm not recoil at the idea that God is spatially enclosed within a finite universe, so that he has the same size as the universe, even though Anselm's definition permits this? Would he not resist the idea that God endures though past, present, and future even though his duration is not bounded by any time?[129] Of course, he would, for "absolutely no greatness

[128] Anselm, *Monologion* XXII.

[129] Cf. Anselm, *Proslogion* XX, where Anselm contrasts God to sempiternal beings: "And do you not also surpass even all eternal things in that both your and their eternity is wholly present to you, whereas they do not yet possess the part of their eternity that is yet to come, just as they no longer possess the part that is past?"

or smallness of extension in place or time applies to him (*nullam penitus localis vel temporalis distentionis magnitudinem suscipit vel parvitatem*)," which can be the case only if God transcends space and time, as the traditional interpretation holds.[130]

So Anselm summarizes:

> This, then, is the condition of place and time: whatever is enclosed within their boundaries does not escape being characterized by parts, whether the sort of parts its place receives with respect to size, or the sort its time suffers with respect to duration; nor can it in any way be contained as a whole all at once by different places or times. By contrast, if something is in no way constrained by confinement in a place or time, no law of places or times forces it into a multiplicity of parts or prevents it from being present as a whole all at once in several places or times. And so, since this is the condition of place and time, the supreme substance, who is not enclosed by any confinement of place or time, is undoubtedly not constrained by any of their laws.[131]

The universe or an entending God is enclosed within space's maximal region and time's full extent, as determined internally. The only way something can be in no way constrained by confinement in a place or time is to exist aspatially and atemporally. Plausibly, then, for Anselm God escapes being confined to any place or time by existing spacelessly and timelessly. In short, while the entension theorist seems to be technically correct that Anselm's definition of "contained" would permit space and time to be uncircumscribed and so unbounded, even if finite, these careless definitions subvert Anselm's clear intention, which is to deny that God is in any way limited in space and time.

We come at length to the question of how God is present at every place and time if he is not located at every place and time. Anselm explains,

> if that supreme essence is said to exist in a place or a time, even though the very same expression is used both of him and of localized or temporal natures because of our customary way of speaking, there is a different meaning because of the dissimilarity of the things themselves. When it comes to localized or temporal natures, this one expression signifies two

[130] Thus Anselm denies that God "receive[s] in himself the distinctions of places or times, such as here or there or somewhere, or now or then or sometime. Nor is it the case that he exists in the fleeting present time that we experience, or that he has existed or will exist in the past or future, since these are proper to circumscribed and changeable things, which he is not" (Anselm, *Monologion* 22). Note that on an entension theoretical interpretation God certainly does receive such determinations, despite not being confined in Anselm's sense to a place or time.

[131] Anselm, *Monologion* XXII.

> things: that they are *present at* the times and places in which they are said to exist, and that they are *contained by* those times and places. But in the case of the supreme essence, only one of these meanings applies, namely, that he is present, not that he is contained by them.
>
> Consequently, if our ordinary way of speaking permitted, it would seem more appropriate to say that he exists *with* a time or place rather than *in* a time or place. For saying that something exists in another thing implies more strongly that it is contained than does saying that it exists with that thing. And so he is properly said to exist in no place or time, since he is in no way contained by any other thing. And yet he can be said in his own way to exist in every place or time, since whatever else exists is sustained by his presence so that it does not fall into nothingness.[132]

Here we have it: God does not exist in, that is to say, is not located at, any place or time, but he is present to every place and time in that he sustains them in being so that they are not annihilated. It is in this sense that God can himself be said to contain all things.[133] God is not in any way in a time or place, but he is with them, sustaining them in being. On the entension theoretical interpretation, what sense can be made of this distinction? For every subregion of space, God is not confined to that subregion but exists in others as well; but when we get to the maximal region of space, there is no place where God can be located with it though not in it. God is not confined to any time but exists at other times as well; but with respect to the full duration of time, there is no time when God might exist with the subintervals of time.

Someone who writes in paradoxes, as Anselm does, can be frustratingly difficult to interpret. Yet the unintelligibility of God's tensed temporal entending supplies the key to unlock the puzzle of God's relationship to space in Anselm's view. God is not confined to any place, even the maximal spatial region, because God exists aspatially. He is nonetheless present to every place because he causally sustains every place in being.

8.3.3 Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas is typically regarded as the quintessential advocate of divine simplicity, timelessness, and spacelessness. This has not deterred proponents of divine omnispatiality from claiming that Aquinas believed

[132] Anselm, *Monologion* XXII. Collier rightly observes the striking absence of any appeal to the soul's being present in its body as an analogy to divine presence (Collier, "Against the Fundamental-Reading," 685–686).
[133] Cf. Anselm, *Proslogion* XX.

that God occupies space.[134] To be sure, Thomas gives voice to the customary slogans that God is "present everywhere" and is "in all things,"[135] but the questions remain: What does it mean to be in all things? How is God present in every place? Fortunately, in contrast to St. Anselm, Thomas addresses these questions fairly straightforwardly.

In his *Summa theologiae* Ia.8.3 Thomas explains that God is everywhere by his power, his presence, and his essence:

> But how he is in other things created by him, may be considered from human affairs. A king, for example, is said to be in the whole kingdom by his power, although he is not everywhere present. Again a thing is said to be by its presence in other things which are subject to its inspection; as things in the house are said to be present to anyone, who nevertheless may not be in substance in every part of the house. Lastly a thing is said to be by way of substance or essence in that place in which its substance may be.[136]

It is striking that the king, though present in the whole of his kingdom by his power, is explicitly said not to be everywhere present throughout his kingdom and someone who has the ability to know the contents of a house is not in substance in every part of the house. This suggests that God's being in a place by his substance or essence is his actually occupying or being located at that place, as proponents of divine spatiality claim.

These illustrations tend to break down, however, in God's case. Unlike the human king, God is everywhere present by his power throughout his kingdom. Similarly, God has actual knowledge of everything in the universe even if he does not occupy every part of it. Finally, while anything

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[134] The most formidable defense of this view is Harm Goris, "Divine Omnipresence in Thomas Aquinas," in *Divine Transcendence and Immanence in the Work of Thomas Aquinas: A Collection of Studies Presented at the Third Conference of the Thomas Instituut Te Utrecht, December 15–17, 2005*, ed. Harm Goris, Herwi Rikhof, and Henk Schoot (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 37–58, who supplies the detailed textual analysis wanting in Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes*, 337; Ross D. Inman, "Retrieving Divine Immensity and Omnipresence," in *T & T Clark Handbook of Analytic Theology*, ed. James M. Arcadi and James T. Turner, Jr. (London: T & T Clark, 2021), 131. Cf. Richard R. La Croix, "Aquinas on God's Omnipresence and Timelessness," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 42, no. 3 (1982): 391–399, who assumes divine spatiality in arguing that Thomas' doctrines of divine omnipresence and divine timelessness are logically incompatible.

[135] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.8. Goris rightly reminds us, "Being a *magister in Sacra Pagina*, it is not Aquinas' task to prove its truth from non-theological arguments, but rather to explain how these biblical texts are to be understood" (Goris, "Omnipresence in Thomas Aquinas," 58). So of course we should expect to find God affirmed to fill all things (Jer 23.24) and to be everywhere (Ps 139.7–10).

[136] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.8.3. This rubric derives from Peter Lombard's *Sentences* I.37.1.2, where on the authority of Gregory the Great he writes, "God, existing ever unchangeably in himself, by presence, power, and essence is in every nature or essence without limitation of himself, and in every place without being bounded, and in every time without change." Unfortunately, Peter does not explain what the terms mean. All three ways of being omnipresent are comprised by the first of the three modes of God's presence identified by Lombard and also by Aquinas: a general mode by which God is present in all of creation, a specific mode of being present in believers by grace, and a mode of existential identity unique to the hypostatic union in Christ (Goris, "Omnipresence in Thomas Aquinas," 37).

whose substance is in a place is said to be there by way of substance or essence, it does not follow that that is the only way to be present by way of substance or essence.

God's being in all things by his power is his providential control of all things, and his being in all things by his presence (an evident misnomer) is God's knowledge of everything in the world. The crucial interpretive question, then, is what is meant by God's being present in a place by his essence (*per essentiam*).[137] Aquinas explains that it is necessary to affirm God's presence in things by his power and knowledge in order to confute certain heretics. He then explains why it is necessary to affirm as well that God is everywhere present by his essence, thereby providing insight into this notion:

> Further, others said that, although all things are subject to God's providence, still all things are not immediately created by God; but that he immediately created the first creatures, and these created the others. Against these it is necessary to say that he is in all things by his essence.[138]

God's unmediated creation of all things would not be secured by the mere affirmation that God occupies every region of space, for the universe does that, nor even by the affirmation that he wholly occupies every region of space, for prime matter, being mereologically simple, does that and so would the soul of an animal if it were all that God created.[139] Mere entension is not enough. Rather God is present by his essence to all things in that he is the immediate ground of being of everything else that exists. Seen in this light, God's being present by his power is more closely related to Aquinas' first and second ways of proving God's existence from motion and causation, and his being present by his essence to Aquinas' third way and the argument of *On Being and Essence* that God and God alone bestows being.[140] So Aquinas summarizes,

> Therefore, God is in all things by his power, inasmuch as all things are subject to his power; he is by his presence in all things, as all things are bare and open to his eyes; he is in all things by his essence, inasmuch as he is present to all as the cause of their being.[141]

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[137] Pasnau claims, "The qualifying phrase 'through his essence' means *really existing there*, as opposed to being there merely cognitively (*per praesentiam*) or merely causally (*per potentiam*)" (Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes*, 353). As we shall see, Goris disagrees: he takes God's being present *per essentiam* to be God's immediately bestowing being on all creatures; but he thinks that in so doing God locates himself in space.

[138] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.8.3.

[139] See Aquinas, Ia.8.4 ad 3, 5.

[140] See especially Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* III.68.2–5. Goris agrees: "God is not merely the cause of change (*motus*) or becoming (*fieri*), like Aristotle's Prime Mover, but is the Creator God, the giver of being (*esse*) as such" (Goris, "Omnipresence in Thomas Aquinas," 42).

[141] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.8.3.

The way in which God is present to things by his essence, then, is his being their immediate existential cause. Nothing Thomas goes on to say qualifies this understanding. Indeed, in response to an objection, he repeats, "God is said to be in all things . . . by his own essence; because his substance is present to all things as the cause of their being."[142]

Proponents of Thomistic divine spatiality may, however, interpret Thomas' account, not reductively, but derivatively. It is in virtue of his being the existential cause of things in space that God is located in space. This is Goris' interpretation of Aquinas' doctrine of divine presence by his essence: "God must be present everywhere because he is the immediate cause of the being of all things. This is, in a nutshell, Aquinas' position."[143]

Goris sees two independent arguments offered by Aquinas for this position, the first from Aristotle's causal contact principle and the second from ibn Sīnā's notion of God as the cause of being. With respect to the first argument, Goris explains, "Aristotle supplies Aquinas with the notion that the mover and the thing moved, the agent and patient, the operator and the thing operated must be together (*simul*) or in contact; any distance between the two has to be bridged by intermediary causes."[144] The principle is to be found in Aristotle's *Physics* VII.2.243a32–245b2, where Aristotle argues against causation at a distance. Goris recognizes that Aristotle allows the soul, in causing effects in its body, to touch the body without itself being touched by it, thereby implying "that 'contact' cannot be said literally of the relation between an incorporeal mover and the body moved."[145] This exception to the requirement of bodily contact seems to provide precedent

[142] Aquinas, Ia.8.3 ad 1. Later he summarizes, "For God is in all things by his essence, power, and presence, according to his one common mode, as the cause existing in the effects which participate in his goodness" (Ia.43.3).

[143] Goris, "Omnipresence in Thomas Aquinas," 39. He explains, "The only way spiritual beings can be in a place is by way of causality: by bringing about an effect in a body, they become located in space" (47). He goes on to say:

> "It is important to note that Aquinas is talking here about real spatial presence of spiritual agents. Neither the idea that an essentially non-spatial, spiritual being only becomes spatial by causing something in a body, nor the analogical, non-circumscriptive character of its spatiality, take anything away from the reality of the spatial presence of the spiritual agent. It is the agent's essence or substance itself which is present in the body moved and, hence, in the place occupied by that body. In other words, it is neither about merely virtual (in the sense of 'having power or control over *x*') nor merely intentional (in the sense of 'knowing *x*') presence. It is about real presence in the literal, non-metaphorical sense of the word. That is exactly what the contact principle intends to affirm. . . . being-in-a-place is not essential to a spiritual being, yet, when operating on a body, it is really and properly present in a place with its whole substance. This goes for the soul, for the angel, and for God" (48).

[144] Goris, "Omnipresence in Thomas Aquinas," 46. For a very thorough analysis of Aquinas' adherence to the causal contact principle and the impossibility of action at a distance, see Francis J. Kovach, "Aquinas's Theory of Action at a Distance: A Critical Analysis," in *Scholastic Challenges to Some Mediaeval and Modern Ideas* (Stillwater, OK: Western Publications, 1987), 149–177. Kovach never really addresses the question of the implications of Thomas' so-called "metaphysical contiguism" for divine spatiality.

[145] Goris, "Omnipresence in Thomas Aquinas," 40. This fact leads Leftow to conclude that "'contact of power' seems just a metaphor. Whether or not things can act at a distance, immaterial things in no way literally touch material things" (Leftow, "Omnipresence.")

for God's being causally related to things in space without being in a spatial relation with them. But Goris insists, "Yet, the contact condition still holds for incorporeal movers insofar as it implies the attribution of a *where* to the incorporeal mover."[146] Goris might well have added the requirement of a *when* as well to the incorporeal mover.

While such a principle plausibly applies to finite incorporeal beings, why think that Thomas expanded its scope to apply to God? Thomas discusses the contact principle in treating God's omnipresence:

> God is in all things . . . as an agent is present to that upon which it works. For an agent must be joined to that wherein it acts immediately, and touch it by its power; hence it is proved in *Physic* vii that the thing moved and the mover must be joined together. Now since God is very being by his own essence, created being must be his proper effect. . . . Now God causes this effect in things not only when they first begin to be, but as long as they are preserved in being. . . . Therefore as long as the thing has being, God must be present to it, according to its mode of being.[147]

Notice the emphasis upon the immediacy of God's bestowal of being and his contact by power, not place, with his effects.[148] Concerning Goris' claim that in order to be the immediate cause of being of things, God must be located where they are, Thomas explicitly repudiates such an objection. While acknowledging Aristotle's proof of the impossibility of causation at a distance, Thomas denies that God's bestowal of being is done at a distance: "No action of an agent, however powerful it may be, acts at a distance, except through a medium. But it belongs to the great power of God that he acts immediately in all things. Hence nothing is distant from him (*nihil est distans ab eo*)."[149] There can be no distance between God and creatures if and only if there is no spatial relation between them.[150]

Moreover, Goris seems to have forgotten God's relationship with time. The contact principle requires that the incorporeal cause exist not only where its patient entity is but also when it is. Otherwise the effect would not occur when it does. But then things' protracted existence would require that God, as their sustaining cause, be temporal. Goris writes:

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[146] Goris, "Omnipresence in Thomas Aquinas," 40.
[147] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.8.1.
[148] Similarly, in affirming that God is wholly present to all things as the soul is to the body, Aquinas says, "Incorporeal things are in place not by contact of dimensive quantity, as bodies are, but by contact of power. . . . Hence, as the soul is whole in every part of the body, so is God whole in all things and in each one" (Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.8.2. ad 1, 3; *Summa contra gentiles* 3.68.3).
[149] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.8.1. ad 3.
[150] Recall Leftow's category mistake *supra*, 338, that the distance between God and creatures is zero.

> God gives each creature its own mode of being and is present in each thing according to its particular mode of being. Because God gives the *esse* that makes a thing exist here-and-now, his immediate agency is not limited to one place (here) at a time (now), but extends to all places at all times. . . . God's giving of being, and hence his presence, must remain as long as the creature exists. God, then, must be present to all corporeal things, and all places, because he is the immediate and permanent giver of being.[151]

But then if God, in virtue of the contact principle, must be in space, he must also be in time. Notice that this inference cannot be averted by appeal to Aquinas' doctrine that God stands in no real relations with creatures, for the argument is not that God's temporal existence is required by his changing relations to things in space but by the contact principle that the causal agent exist when and where its effect is produced. As the sustaining cause of the universe, God would have to exist at all times and endure throughout time and so have a past, present, and future and undergo temporal becoming, experiencing a fleeting present while constantly losing his past and not yet having his future, all in contradiction to Thomas' doctrine of divine eternity, not to mention his doctrines of divine simplicity and immutability.

Goris appeals to a second argument, borrowed from ibn Sīnā, to show that Thomas believed in divine spatiality: "God is not merely a cause of change (*motus*) or becoming (*fieri*), like Aristotle's Prime Mover, whose causal efficacy is only demanded during the process of change, but . . . God is the Creator God, a cause of being that gives being (*esse*) as such and whose agency remains necessary throughout the creatures' existence."[152] We have already seen that such an argument, if successful, would require God to be temporal as well as spatial. But why think that in order to immediately bestow being God needs to be located in space? Goris' assumption in this regard seems gratuitous. Is God not able to create space itself, as well as time? Of course, he is. When God first caused things to be, space did not exist, and so being located in the same place as his effects could not have been a necessary condition of creation.[153] Thomas writes, "God . . . has

[151] Goris, "Omnipresence in Thomas Aquinas," 54, 57. Cf. Goris, 44, on the necessity of "the sustained and sustaining activity of the initial efficient cause. . . for the effect to remain" and Goris, 46, on the necessity of God's creative agency, not only during a process of change, but "throughout the creatures' existence." Similarly, Kovach: "the creative action of God must be continuous and requires God's continuous presence in the most intimate manner" (Kovach, "Aquinas's Theory," 153).

[152] Goris, "Omnipresence in Thomas Aquinas," 46; cf. 42–43.

[153] Note that a relational theory of space, which involves a derivative account of space, is crucially different from Goris' account of divine omnipresence. In the relational case God existing spacelessly sans the universe creates some physical objects *ex nihilo*, and space derives in some way from the relations obtaining between them. God's creating the objects does not presuppose the prior existence of space, either temporally or explanatorily. Hence, his creation of the universe does not entail his existence in space.

been from eternity prior to all place. But by the immensity of his power he touches upon all things that are in place, for he is the universal cause of being. . . . Thus he is present in his entirety wherever he is, since he touches upon all things by his simple power."[154]

Moreover, we face a question concerning explanatory priority: on divine omnispatiality, is God's spatio-temporal location explanatorily prior to his causal action or is his causal action explanatorily prior to his spatio-temporal location? Goris asserts that "in the case of God, his spatial presence not only allows the presence of the body at the same place, but is absolutely necessary in order for the body to be there at all."[155] Goris' assumption entails a deep incoherence. If the bestowal of being requires that God be spatially located, then space would have to exist prior to God's creation of space, not merely explanatorily prior but temporally prior as well. But then God could not initially create the world *ex nihilo* unless space already existed. If the existence of space and time are necessary prerequisites of creation, then even in possible worlds in which God refrains from creation, space and time must exist, for in their absence God is not even able to create, so that they are, like God, metaphysically necessary entities. Indeed, being uncreatable, they exist *a se*, thereby compromising God's unique aseity and the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, contrary to Thomas' teaching.[156]

On the other hand, if we say that God's causal action is explanatorily prior to his spatio-temporal location, then we inevitably draw God into both space and time, which is incompatible, as we have seen, with Thomas' doctrines of divine eternity, simplicity, and immutability.

So the interpreter faces a choice: shall we ascribe to Aquinas a deeply incoherent doctrine of divine omnipresence or rather take him to hold to divine aspatiality, as traditionally thought? While Thomas is not at all beyond embracing incoherent doctrines, as we saw with respect to his doctrine of divine simplicity, we ought to be reluctant to ascribe incoherence to him when an alternative is staring us in the face, namely, that God transcends space and causes things to occur and exist in space.

As for the biblical language of God's filling every place, plausibly Thomas does not mean this in the sense of being spatially located or occupying space, but, once more, in the sense of being the ground of being of all

[154] Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* III.68.10.

[155] Goris, "Omnipresence in Thomas Aquinas," 54–55.

[156] Goris, while affirming that for Thomas "the Creator God . . . transcends space and time," never answers his initial question: "How can a God who is immanent in all creatures, in all spatial objects and in all places, at the same time . . . transcend all things as their Creator?" (Goris, "Omnipresence in Thomas Aquinas," 58, 38).

other things: "He is in all things in the fashion of an agent cause."[157] "By the very fact that he gives being to the things that fill every place, he himself fills every place."[158] Such expressions should be understood reductively not derivatively. Goris himself notes that some of Aquinas' most quoted phrases about *esse* occur in the context of his discussions of divine omnipresence:

> God is most intimate in everything, as the proper being of a thing is most intimate in the thing itself (*In I Sent*. d. 37 q. 1 a. 1).
>
> Being is that which is more intimate in everything and which is more profoundly in all things, because it is formal with respect to all that is in reality. . . . Therefore, God needs to be in all things, and intimately (*STh* I, q. 8 a. 1).
>
> Because being is most intimate in everything, God, who gives being by working, works in things as a most intimate agent. . . . Therefore, because the being of a thing is most intimate in everything, it is clear that God is in all things by his essence, through which he creates all things (*In Joh* 1, 5 §133).

Goris comments, "Spatial expressions fail to express God's innermost presence. He is in each creature at the deepest level, in its innermost core, at the foundation of its being."[159] Since creatures are composed of being and essence, God is present to them in their metaphysical composition. This sort of intimate, metaphysical presence does not require his occupying space.

8.3.4 Conclusion

Obviously we have just scratched the surface of the rich historical material concerning the doctrine of omnipresence. But our survey of these three important figures suffices to discount sweeping claims that divine spatiality has been the universally accepted view of mainstream Christian theology. Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas, while faithfully repeating biblical language about God's being present to all things and containing all things, all accepted reductive accounts of divine omnipresence. Interestingly, in each case considerations pertinent to God's relationship to time proved

[157] Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* III.68.11.
[158] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.8.2. Cf. "God is above all things by the excellence of his nature; nevertheless, he is in all things as the cause of the being of all things" (Ia.8.1 ad 1). Again, "For whatever number of places be supposed, even if an infinite number be supposed besides what already exist, it would be necessary that God should be in all of them; for nothing can exist except by him" (Ia.8.4). Again, "God must be simultaneously present in all things, particularly since he continually and always preserves in being those things which he has brought into being from non-being" (Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* III.68.6).
[159] Goris, "Omnipresence in Thomas Aquinas," 55.

determinative for discerning his relationship to space: for Augustine the impossibility of spatio-temporal things' being really present to God; for Anselm the unintelligibility of tensed times' existing all at once; and for Aquinas the requirement of the contact principle that God be in time as well as in space. The fact that such authors freely employ biblical (and Plotinian!) expressions of divine spatiality while offering reductive accounts of divine omnipresence should alert future discussants to the need for careful textual exegesis rather than mere proof-texting.

8.4 Assessment of the Debate

We come now to some assessment of the question of divine spatiality/aspatiality. Given our conviction, previously argued, that God is temporal,[160] at least since the moment of creation, the need to preserve divine timelessness, so important for the theologians we have surveyed, does not concern us. Therefore, Hudson's fourth puzzle or problem confronting literal occupation accounts of divine omnipresence, namely, the problem of timelessness,[161] may be set aside. Indeed, given the analogies between space and time, the conviction that God is temporal might dispose us to look favorably upon divine spatiality as well.

On the other hand, the fact that space is a creation of God *ex nihilo* at some time in the finite past, whether fundamentally as a substance in its own right or derivatively as a relationalist view would have it, implies that God exists aspatially sans the universe, if not before it.[162] Committed by the doctrine of creation to divine aspatiality to begin with, we might be ill-disposed to surrender divine spacelessness for divine spatiality in the absence of persuasive arguments.

[160] See *supra*, 349–363.

[161] See *supra*, 366.

[162] Oakes, "Divine Omnipresence," 175–176, advocates the view that space is not a creation of God but an essential aspect of God, existing even in possible worlds in which no cosmos exists. Not that God would then fill an otherwise empty space; rather Oakes thinks that God does not occupy space. This appears to be incoherent, for if space is a property of God himself, then God is spatially extended and, hence, in space. In contrast to Newton's view, according to which space is an emanative effect of God and so distinct from God, Oakes in effect divinizes space, which is panentheistic. Similarly, J. D. Lyonhart, *Space God: Rejudging a Debate between More, Newton, and Einstein* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2023), endorses a More-inspired view, "not that God fills space, rather, that God *is* space. God is not the biggest entity *within* space . . . but instead his immensity *constitutes* space" (190). Such a view is pantheistic, explanatorily vicious (since nothing constitutes itself), and self-contradictory (since the constitution relation is not identity).

8.4.1 Arguments for Divine Spatiality

8.4.1.1 Biblical Accord

Perhaps the most important argument on behalf of divine spatiality is its literal accord with the biblical data on divine omnipresence, which seem to imply a God who exists throughout space. Important as this factor is, however, its force is tempered by Scripture's evident anthropomorphism, the biblical writers' lack of a reflective context for considering questions about God's relationship to space, and the biblical writers' conviction that God is in heaven, which utterly transcends the world and whence he acts in the world. So it would be tenuous, indeed, to conclude on the basis of biblical data alone that God is spatial.

Are there, then, some arguments that the philosophical theologian might offer in support of divine spatiality? In his survey of arguments on behalf of the respective positions Hayden Stephan mentions three arguments for divine spatiality.[163]

8.4.1.2 Perfect Being Theology

First are considerations arising from perfect being theology. For example, after providing scriptural proofs of God's immensity (God's being uncircumscribed by spatial limits), Francis Turretin argues that God is present by his essence everywhere: "If God is not immense in essence, but finite, it will favor the contradiction that the creature is greater than God. For as nothing can be added to infinity, so it is of the nature of the finite that something can always be added to it. Indeed if the essence of God is not elsewhere than in heaven, the universe will be greater than God."[164] This sort of argument is, however, directed against opponents who thought that God is "contained in heaven" as a place and so finite in his presence.[165] The argument, in effect, is that God cannot be entirely located in any place, even heaven, because being so located would be incompatible with his infinity. Obviously, defenders of divine spacelessness do not so conceive God.

It is noteworthy that even the affirmation that God is wholly and entirely located within the universe will not satisfy Turretin (any more than it would have satisfied Anselm) because God would then be merely finite. So God

[163] Hayden Stephan, "God and Spatial Location: A Defense of Divine Spacelessness" (PhD diss., St. Louis University, 2022), chaps. 2–4.
[164] Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* trans. George Musgrave Geiger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1992), 1:199.
[165] Turretin, 1:198.

must somehow exist "beyond" the universe. But this "beyond" should not be taken to imply that God or space is embedded in a hyperspace:

> When God is said to be immense (as so everywhere in the world that nevertheless he is not included in the world, which is finite, but may be conceived to be also beyond the world), this ought not to be understood positively (as if certain spaces are to be conceived of beyond the world which God completely fills by his presence) but negatively (inasmuch as the universal spaces of the world do not exhaust the immensity of God so as to be contained in and circumscribed by them). He is said, therefore, to be beyond the world . . . , not as being in certain imaginary places, but in himself by the infinity of his own essence, as he was before the creation of the world in himself.[166]

We have here a strong affirmation of God's transcendence of space. He is beyond the world in the same way that he was prior to the creation of the world. But he is present by his essence throughout the world without being contained in the world.

Turretin frankly admits that he does not really understand what is meant by divine immensity, but he is sure what it excludes:

> This only is to be held as certain – that it does not consist either in the multiplication of the divine essence. . . ; or in the extension and diffusion of any corporeal mass. . . ; or in physical contact . . . ; but in the simple and to us incomprehensible infinity of the divine essence, which is so intimately present with all things that it is both everywhere in the world and yet is not included in the world.[167]

God's being the transcendent ground of being of the world fits this bill perfectly.

The argument from perfect being theology thus tends to backfire. A God who transcends space and sustains all spatial things in being is plausibly greater than one who must himself exist in space in order to sustain spatial things and who is in turn limited in space by its shape and size.[168] This argument is not conclusive, however, for a transcendent God might have reason to condescend to enter into space, just as he had reason to assume a human nature for the sake of our redemption. But such a reason is as yet forthcoming.

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[166] Turretin, 1:200.

[167] Turretin, 1:198.

[168] Stephan invites us to imagine two beings X and Y who differ only in that X's ability to act in space has ubiquitous entension as a prerequisite, whereas Y's does not. He asks, "Which being would be greater? It seems obvious that the latter would be greater, and it seems to be a coherent conception of God; therefore, the X is not the greatest conceivable being and cannot be identical to God, despite X's omnipotence" (Stephan, "God and Spatial Location," prospectus).

8.4.1.3 The Contact Principle

Next is the argument we encountered in Aquinas based on the demands of the contact principle that there be no action at a distance. Pasnau distinguishes between explanatory and evidential versions of this objection,[169] but these labels are misleading. What is really at stake is two competing accounts of explanatory priority. According to one account, God's existence in space is explanatorily prior to his causing effects in space; being spatially located is a metaphysical prerequisite of causing spatial effects. According to the other account, God's causing a spatial effect is what serves to locate him in space; God's causing some spatial effect thus explains why God is in space.

Again, this argument in either version can be given short shrift. Although there is vigorous debate among metaphysicians and philosophers of science about whether there can be action at a distance, such debates can be left aside, since even if the contact principle is true, as Aquinas saw, there just is no distance between the transcendent God and spatial creatures, so that in being causally connected to them God does not violate the "no action at a distance" principle.

Hence, the version of the objection that takes God's spatial location to be a prerequisite of his causing a spatial event fails. It is precisely because God need not be located in space in order to cause effects in space that God is able to create space and the universe in the first place. As Scotus wrote, "Before the creation of the universe, it was no more the case that God was here, where the universe now is, than it is that he is outside the imagined universe, where nothing is."[170] Yet God is able to create *ex nihilo* spatially extended objects and space itself. Stephan suggests that the relationalist might avert this objection by claiming that space exists explanatorily prior to the act of creation simply in virtue of God's existence. "God stands in a spatial relation of a distance of zero to himself; thus, God's very existence would be sufficient for the existence of space."[171] Alternatively, the relationalist could claim that God creates space only in the sense that he creates spatially related objects. "Even if God created one material object – a single electron, say – the relationalist could say that space is brought into existence by a spatial relation that holds between God and the electron, namely, that the distance between God and the electron is zero."[172] Both of these alternatives, however, are guilty of the category mistake of confusing

[169] Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes*, 353.
[170] Scotus *Reportatio* I, d. 37, qq. 1–2, n. 20. I am indebted to Hayden Stephan for this reference.
[171] Stephan, "God and Spatial Location," prospectus.
[172] Stephan, prospectus.

no distance relation with a distance relation of zero. Stephan appropriately asks, "What motivation is there, then, for preferring the position that there is a distance between God and other things over the simpler position that God just does not stand in spatial relations? . . . To appeal to the 'no action at a distance' principle to support the view that there is a distance between God and other objects would be begging the question at this point."[173]

According to the other version of the objection, while being in space is not a prerequisite of causing an effect in space, still in virtue of causing a spatial effect, God thereby locates himself in space. But there is no good reason to think that this claim is true. Here we find a useful analogy in the causal connection between our spacetime universe and realities beyond our spacetime manifold featured in certain contemporary cosmological models. Consider, for example, Paul Steinhardt and Neil Turok's Cyclic Ekpyrotic model of the universe, which makes use of the extra-dimensional nature of string theory to facilitate cycling of our universe.[174] String theory allows entities known as membranes or, for short, branes that represent what we would normally call our three (spatial)-dimensional universe. String theory demands six extra dimensions of space in order to be self-consistent. It is thought that these extra dimensions are (usually) tightly curled up around the three macroscopic dimensions and hence usually unobservable. The Ekpyrotic model proposes that one of these extra dimensions (the "bulk" dimension) is of macroscopic size. Within this extra dimension lie two 3-dimensional branes, either of which could represent our universe. These 3-branes periodically collide and recede, just as if they were connected by a spring. When they collide, the energy of the collision is transferred to the branes. This energy is then converted into the matter (and radiation) that ultimately gravitates into galaxies. The rest of the normal big bang sequence follows (stars, planets, and so on). As the branes separate from each other, the branes themselves continually expand. Meanwhile, the branes cycle toward another collision, and our universe is renewed with each new cycle.

Such a model does not provide an analogy to an immaterial entity's causing effects in our universe, since the membranes are physical realities; nor is the model analogous to there being no distance between our spatial universe and some ultramundane reality, since the membranes are embedded in a hyperspace in which distance can be assigned a measure. Nevertheless, the model does illustrate the way in which an entity not located in our 3-D space can produce effects in that space. If the model is possible, it shows that the cause of something in our universe need not itself be

[173] Stephan, prospectus.
[174] Paul J. Steinhardt and Neil Turok, "The Cyclic Model Simplified," *New Astronomy Reviews* 49 (2005): 43–57.

in our universe. So God could cause events in our universe without being located in it. The Cyclic Ekpyrotic model may not be physically possible, but it seems to be at least metaphysically possible, which is all one needs to subvert the contention that God by producing effects in space locates himself in space.

Since both versions of the objection based on the contact principle fail, this objection does not provide a good reason for thinking God to be spatially located.

8.4.1.4 The Divine Causal Pairing Problem

The third argument Stephan identifies in support of divine spatiality is the divine causal pairing problem that we encountered in our discussion of divine incorporeality. By way of reminder, the objection is that if we imagine there to be two souls that each performs an identical mental act at the same time, resulting in a physical change in a particular body, say, its arm's rising, there must be some relation that pairs one soul's mental act with the physical change rather than the other soul's mental act.[175] If we assume that souls are not in space, spatial relations could not explain why one soul is paired with the bodily change rather than the other. Analogously, as an immaterial entity who is causally connected with everything in the universe, God must then exist at every place in the universe.

In response to the divine causal pairing argument the theist might explain the pairing of God's mental acts with certain effects based, not on spatial co-location, but rather on the basis of divine intentionality: God infallibly wills that some effect occur. "God can pick out intentional objects in a direct, unmediated, immediate, and non-causal way. . . . then the divine pairing problem facing divine causation has a solution: God willing for some event E to occur and E's actual occurrence are paired by God's picking out of E as an intentional object of his will."[176] Such a perspicuous and plausible solution dissolves any alleged divine causal pairing problem.

In sum, the arguments proffered in support of divine spatiality of any sort are pretty weak arguments. Are there any better arguments in support of divine spacelessness?

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[175] Jaegwon Kim, *Physicalism, or Something Near Enough* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 79–80. For an application to divine omnipresence, see Andrei A. Buckareff, "Theological Realism, Divine Action, and Divine Location," in *Alternative Concepts of God: Essays on the Metaphysics of the Divine*, ed. Andrei A. Buckareff and Yujin Nagasawa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 213–233.

[176] Stephan, "God and Spatial Location," prospectus.

8.4.2 Arguments for Divine Aspatiality

We can do no better than to begin with Hud Hudson's objections to divine spatiality. It does not seem to be appreciated in the contemporary discussion that Hudson, while defending the conceptual possibility of divine entension, spanning, and non-maximal location, regards them all as metaphysically impossible. He advances four problems in support of the conclusion that "extended mereological simples are conceptually possible yet metaphysically impossible: the problem of spatial intrinsics, the problem of shapes, the problem of parsimony, and the problem of diachoric identity."[177] So as not to end this section anticlimactically, let us consider these problems in reverse order.

8.4.2.1 The Problem of Diachoric Identity

Just as philosophers have wrestled with the question of identity over time (diachronic identity), so the question arises as to identity over place (diachoric identity). The challenge in the first case is to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for something's being the same object at two different times and typically takes the form:

> Necessarily (for any distinct times t and t^*, and for any object x that is located at t, and for any object y that is located at t^*, $x = y$ if and only if ____).

Analogously, the challenge in the second case is to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for a single thing's being simultaneously located at more than one place and would presumably take the form:

> Necessarily (for any time t, and for any distinct spatial regions r and r^*, and for any object x that at t is located at r, and for any object y that at t is located at r^*, $x = y$ if and only if ____).

This challenge is closely related to Hudson's second puzzle or problem facing a literal occupation account of omnipresence mentioned earlier: the problem of multilocation.[178] It will be recalled that Hudson merely explained how occupation theorists address such questions but did not weigh the adequacy of their solutions. Here he questions the adequacy of those solutions.

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[177] Hudson, *Hyperspace*, chap. 4, online abstract, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199282579.003.0005; cf. 106–107.

[178] See *supra*, 366.

Hudson notes that in discussions of diachronic identity philosophers have staked out three broad alternatives: (i) that there are criteria of diachronic identity for any object, (ii) that there are criteria of diachronic identity for kinds of object, and (iii) that diachronic identity is a criterionless, brute fact.

Hudson believes that the first alternative depends for its defense on the perdurantist's rejecting the above schema in favor of the controversial metaphysical claim that objects persist in time in virtue of having different temporal parts *x* and *y* at different times. Applied to diachoric identity, this alternative supports the pertension theorist's claim that *x* and *y* are not, in fact, the same object but are parts of a pertending object that has parts at *r* and *r**. For if *x* and *y* take the objects exactly located at *r* and *r** as their respective values, then the above schema must be rejected, since *x* and *y* are not identical. Obviously, a pertensionist account of diachoric identity is of no use in explaining God's ubiquitous presence, since he has no spatial parts. Nor will it be of any help to maintain that *x* and *y* are identical just in case they are constituted by the same portion of stuff, since God, as an incorporeal being, is not constituted by any sort of stuff. Hudson can think of no other way to fill in the blank so as to allow an object to exist wholly at disjoint spatial regions.

What about the second alternative, that there are criteria of diachronic identity for kinds of object? Hudson dismisses this alternative quickly as of no help in formulating criteria of either diachronic or diachoric identity. It is clear, he says, "that analyzing what it is to be an instance of some given kind *K* (or analyzing the concept of a *K*) will not tell us what it takes for a *K* to persist over time. Moreover, if 'being of a kind *K*' doesn't fix what it takes to persist across time, it has even less hope of determining what it takes to extend across space at a time."[179] Accordingly, he finds the appeal to kind-relative criteria to be of little value in formulating an adequate criterion of diachoric identity.

So what to do? It seems that the advocates of divine spatiality should adopt the alternative that diachoric identity is just a brute fact and reject the demand for criteria. Although Hudson sees this as a disadvantage for proponents of divine ubiquity, he says nothing to defeat the persuasive case philosophers have made in defense of such an alternative for diachronic identity.[180] Still, while it is plausible that some object may endure through time as a brute fact, it is very difficult to see why, for example, two disjoint spherical regions pervaded by matter would be one multi-located sphere

[179] Hudson, *Hyperspace,* 118.
[180] Recall Trenton Merricks, *Object and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

rather than two distinct spheres. God's immateriality may make it easier to think that he can be wholly located at two disjoint regions, even if material objects cannot. The problem of diachoric identity, as formulated in terms of the quest for criteria, is therefore not a decisive objection to divine spatiality.

8.4.2.2 The Problem of Parsimony

This problem recurs to the first problem Hudson identified with literal occupation accounts of divine omnipresence: the problem of simplicity.[181] Hudson believes that among competing theories that are equal in explanatory and predictive power we should choose that theory which is the simplest. But if there are extended simple objects, this principle threatens to lead to absurd consequences. To show why, he invites us to consider a possible world with exactly one material object that is located in more than one spatial region. This object must be either entended or multi-located in space. But why stop there? Why could it not be an extended simple in the shape of a chair or a scattered simple in the shape of an entire dining set or even a scattered simple that looks just like the Heidelberg castle with all of its furnishings? Indeed, why could it not be a simple, point-size object multiply located in 10^{80} regions, so that it looks exactly like our universe? Why multiply entities beyond necessity? Hudson says, "I suppose the following reasoning is a bit too quick," but he offers it nonetheless:

> if entending or multiply locating objects were possible, then the exotic items described above would be possible as well. But we should choose the simplest theory from among all those competitors that are equal in explanatory and predictive power, and in the present market this methodology would yield the conclusion that the world is populated by a single simple bearing an uncountable number of occupation relations to distinct regions. But since that verdict is absurd, entending and multiply located objects are not possible, after all.[182]

Whether we find this consideration persuasive will depend on the relative weight we place on the value of parsimony of entities. As Hudson recognizes, it is easy to imagine rationally giving up the principle rather than the possibility of entended objects. In any case, this problem is at best an objection to entended material objects. The proponent of divine ubiquitous entension could happily reject them while maintaining that God is entended throughout space.

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[181] See *supra*, 365.
[182] Hudson, *Hyperspace,* 114.

8.4.2.3 The Problem of Shapes

This problem is intimately related to Hudson's aforementioned third and fifth problems of occupation accounts of divine omnipresence, namely, the problem of containment and the problem of incorporeality.[183] It is quite natural, Hudson says, to think that spatial regions have their shapes intrinsically. After all, the shape of a specified region of space does not seem dependent upon any relation to anything else. On the other hand, material objects seem to have their shapes extrinsically insofar as they inherit them from the regions they occupy. This derivative relation seems even more obvious in the case of spatially extended immaterial objects, since independent of space they have no shape. Now advocates of entended entities take it to be possible that an entended object should simultaneously occupy regions of different shapes. But given that an object cannot have incompatible shapes at the same time, entension seems ruled out.

The entension theorist may respond that while an entending object is wholly located at multiple regions, the shape of any object is fixed by the single region at which it is entirely located. The multi-location theorist may be in real trouble here, Hudson muses, since for him there may no region at which an object is entirely located, but the entension theorist seems to be in the clear. For on an entension theoretical approach, God has the shape and size of the maximal spatial region at which he is entirely located.

Joseph Jedwab is unconvinced by the entension theorist's response. He asserts,

> There is nothing special in itself about the region, if any, at which a substance is entirely located. Suppose some photon is located at only two point-sized regions P and P' at once. The photon has a point-sized shape: the same in every point-sized region at which it is located. But since the photon is located at only P and P', and since P and P' are disjoint, the photon is entirely located at neither P nor P' and so the photon is *entirely* located at no region. So the photon has a shape but is *entirely* located at no region. The regions that determine shape are the regions at which a substance is located *simpliciter*.[184]

Unfortunately, Jedwab's argument only goes to reiterate Hudson's claim that the multi-location theorist is in trouble. For Jedwab stipulates that

[183] See *supra*, 366–367. It also touches the sixth problem, the problem of co-location, which would arise if one takes God to be a material object. But if we reject that claim, then the co-location of an immaterial and a material entity seems not so problematic, so I shall consider this alleged problem to be solved.

[184] Joseph Jedwab, "God's Omnipresence: A Defence of the Classical View," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 8, no. 2 (2016): 145–146.

the photon is located *only* at P and P'. If the photon were an entending object, located wholly at P and P' simultaneously, the entension theorist can maintain that it is entirely located at the fusion of P and P', which, paradoxically, is itself point-sized.[185] What makes an entending object's entire location special, as we saw in the case of the homogeneous sphere hovering over the window sill of one's office, is that the object is wholly present in regions of different shapes, in this case having a spherical shape in each hemispherical region it occupies. Jedwab's commonsensical claim that "Any substance located at [some region] R has the same shape as R does. Otherwise, the substance wouldn't fit into R"[186] fails in the case of entending objects. An extended mereological simple might not be exactly located in a subregion r, but it will "fit" into r by being wholly present there without assuming r's shape. Nonetheless, Jedwab's objection is of value in that it underlines just how weird entension is.

Now Hudson thinks that God's satisfying the condition of being entirely located in the maximal spatial region is sufficient for God's being a material object. If Hudson's claim involves merely a re-definition of "material object," such that any object that occupies a spatial region is ipso facto "material," even though it is non-physical, then his claim is just a radical linguistic revision. But if he means to say that occupying space is sufficient for an object's being constituted by matter and energy and describable by the laws of physics, such as $E = mc^2$, then his conclusion is theologically repugnant. If he is correct that divine spatial ubiquity implies that God is a physical object, then we have a decisive argument against divine spatiality and in support of divine spacelessness. Fortunately for adherents of divine spatial ubiquity, there are other accounts of what it is to be a material object that are as plausible as Hudson's, so that occupation accounts are not burdened by the albatross of God's being a material object.[187]

Up to this point, we have tolerated talk of an entending God's geometrical and topological properties. But surely there is something very weird, even sacrilegious, about such a notion. As classical theologians saw, it seems intolerable to think that God might be entirely located in a finite space, and one that is constantly expanding, as ours is. Are we really to think that God is constantly growing, getting bigger and bigger, but may one day begin to shrink, as space re-contracts until it finally disappears at the big crunch

[185] See Gilmore, "Location and Mereology," §6.

[186] Jedwab, "God's Omnipresence," 144; similarly, Gasser, "God's Omnipresence," 50.

[187] Inman, "Omnipresence," 25–31. Jedwab accepts Hudson's principle that any substance that has a shape is material and infers that since regions of space themselves have shapes, therefore regions of (empty) space are material objects (Jedwab, "God's Omnipresence," 144)! This implication is to my mind the *reductio ad absurdum* of the principle.

and God reverts to spacelessness? Does God actually have a shape? Is he curved or flat? Could he be, like space, torus-shaped or shaped like a cup and handle? Such suggestions seem almost crazy.

One might think to avoid this problem by adopting an intersection account of divine spatiality, according to which God is located exclusively at point-sized regions. Since on such an account, God is not entirely located anywhere, he would not have the shape of the regions he occupies. An intersection account seems to capture more accurately the intuitions of late medieval theologians, who denied that God is extended throughout space and so exists circumscriptively in any place, including even the universal spatial region, or definitively, being wholly present in a bounded spatial region rather in than all, but rather affirmed that God exists repletively, being wholly present at every place but without extension.[188] In a sense, Hudson has derouted the whole contemporary discussion of divine omnispatiality by focusing on accounts of spatial extension (*e.g.*, entension vs. pertension), thereby obscuring the fact that mainstream theologians did not on any account take God is be an extended entity.

Still, while the association of God's shape with the region at which he is entirely located seems natural on an entension theoretical account, such an association does not seem appropriate for an intersection account. For on this account God occupies only regions having the same shape. Points have geometrical properties, too, and removing a point from space leaves a hole of a certain size and shape in the manifold (indeed, such a spacetime is called geodesically incomplete, since a geodesic comes to an end at such a hole). God, being wholly located at any such point, seems to have the geometrical properties of that point. On such an account, God is not merely spatially limited, he is infinitely small. He occupies no non-point-sized region, much less the maximal region of space as a whole. If we blend intersection and entension into a composite theory, then we are back to the implication that God has the topological and geometrical properties of the universe and the maximal spatial region.

Hudson's proposed solution to the problem of containment should not satisfy Christian theists. It will be recalled that Hudson suggested that God stands in his occupation relations accidentally, not essentially, since God

[188] On this distinction see Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theol*ogy (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985), s.v. "Praesentia," 239–241; but note the fatally ambiguous and perhaps contradictory assertion that a being that exists repletively is "identified as filling space or acting upon space while at the same time transcending it" (Muller, s.v. "repletivus, -a, -um," 263). See also Inman, "Retrieving Divine Immensity," 129–131.

could have refrained from creating the universe and would have existed even if there had been no regions of space at all. While it is doubtless true that God could have existed without space and, indeed, did so exist sans the universe, it remains the case for proponents of divine spatiality that God is now limited by space in virtue of his occupation relations. Barring some sort of hyperspace, his immensity is constricted by the spatial limits of our universe.

Divine ubiquitous entension thus merits what David Lewis called "the incredulous stare." It might be said that other widely accepted theories, such as quantum mechanics, are similarly weird. But notice a crucial difference: we have overwhelming empirical evidence that despite its weirdness, quantum theory is true (or nearly so). But we have no comparable reasons to think that divine ubiquitous entension is true. The arguments in support of it that we have surveyed are very weak, leaving us with no good reason to embrace it. Therefore, its weirdness should count against it.

8.4.2.4 The Problem of Spatial Intrinsics

The problem posed here for spatially extended objects is analogous to the problem of temporary intrinsics for temporally persisting objects that prompted David Lewis to articulate perdurance as a way in which objects might persist through time. The problem posed by intrinsic change for identity over time is that the Indiscernibility of Identicals requires that for any objects x and y, if x and y are in fact one and the same object, then x and y share all and only the same properties. But then how, for example, can the Lord Mayor be the same person as the schoolboy Johnny he once was, since they have different intrinsic properties? How is identity through intrinsic change possible?

Endurantists, who accept a tensed theory of time, answer that the only properties a temporal entity has are those it presently has, since neither past nor future times exist. Thus the schoolboy Johnny now has all and only the properties of the Lord Mayor, since he no longer has the properties he (the Lord Mayor) once had. Temporal entities thus wholly exist at each successive moment of their existence. Lewis, by contrast, a partisan of tenseless time who believed that all times, whether past, present, or future, are on an ontological par, held that things persist in time by having different temporal parts at different times. The schoolboy Johnny and the Lord Mayor are thus different temporal parts of an object that is extended throughout tenseless time. On such a view intrinsic change never really takes place, for neither the

temporal parts of a thing nor the extended thing as a whole ever change in their properties.

The analogous problem of spatial intrinsics concerns how an object can have different properties at different places and remain self-identical.[189] There is an obvious answer for pertending objects: their spatial parts have different properties at different places. Thus some object may be pointed at one end but blunt at the other. The problem becomes acute, however, for extended mereologically simple objects. Recall the simple, homogeneous sphere hovering over the window sill of one's office. Since it is simple, we cannot say that part of it is in the office and part of it in the street. It seems to have the incompatible properties of being wholly in the office and wholly in the street. Fans of entension will say that there is no incompatibility here: objects can be wholly located at disjoint spaces. The object wholly located in one's office also has the property of being wholly in the street.

But now suppose that some such object is not perfectly homogeneous: suppose, for example, that the simple sphere is colored in such a way that it gradually shades from red to blue. In such a case it seems to have incompatible properties that cannot be ascribed to its different parts. Some philosophers therefore reject heterogeneous, extended simples. But other philosophers have come up with a plethora of arcane solutions to the problem: some distinguish between the object and the stuff of which it is made, holding that the stuff alone is mereologically complex; others advocate spatially indexed properties: the object has the properties of *being red-at-r* and *being blue-at-r**; others suggest an adverbial strategy: the object is *r*ly red and *r**ly blue; others that properties are actually three-place relations: the object is red relative to *r* and blue relative to *r**; others that the object has a so-called distributional property describing how its colors are distributed throughout it.

Now these various solutions may strike us as desperate concoctions, about each one of which we may well be skeptical. Hudson for his part muses, "Perhaps, however, you find all of these suggestions unacceptable. . . . But that's a lot to hang on some perhapses," and so he moves on to the next worry. But the proponent of divine spatiality should not rush too quickly on. Is there a problem of spatial intrinsics attending ubiquitous divine spatiality that is not plausibly resolved by such proposals? It seems to me that there is.

[189] It is thus also known as the problem of qualitative variation and is closely connected with the problem of multilocation. See Gilmore, "Location and Mereology," §§5.5, 6.

God is supposed to be wholly present at every region of space or at least at multiple regions of space. As an omniscient being God must know where he is. But then we run smack dab into the problem of spatial intrinsics. For at each location at which God is wholly present, God must believe, "I am here." But since the spatial indexical term "here" refers to the location of its user, God will be in different belief states at different places in space. Thus God at different places will have different intrinsic properties and so cannot be identical across space. Instead, we have polytheism, just as Anselm feared.

In responding to this problem, Stephan writes,

> Perhaps one can take God to exhibit qualitative variation by having different items of knowledge at different regions of space. In particular, one might think that God's knowledge of where he is varies from location to location. For instance, on Earth, God knows 'I am on Earth,' and on Mars, God knows 'I am on Mars.' The question would arise, then, whether God's having such items of knowledge entails that God exhibits qualitative variation. But it seems that it is prima facie coherent to maintain that God's knowledge that 'I am at R' is had by God no matter where else he is. On Earth, God knows 'I am on Mars.' So God's knowledge of where he is does not seem to suggest that he is a qualitatively varying extended simple.[190]

Stephan has overlooked what John Perry has called "the essential indexical."[191] I self-locate by means of my temporal and spatial indexical beliefs. Just as I must have temporal indexical beliefs about what time it is now if I am to act in a timely fashion, so I must have spatial indexical beliefs about what is here or there if I am to act in an appropriate and effective fashion. Given his omnipresence God certainly does have on Earth the non-indexical locative knowledge that "I am on Mars." But given that God is wholly present in every spatial region, he must have as well the beliefs, "I am here on Mars," and "I am here on Earth." Absent such indexical knowledge the God who exists wholly on Mars would not know where he is, which is an unacceptable imperfection, just as a God who existed at all times but did not know what time it is now would suffer from unacceptable ignorance.[192]

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[190] Stephan, "God and Spatial Location," prospectus.

[191] John Perry, "The Problem of the Essential Indexical," *Noûs* 13, no. 1 (1979): 3–21.

[192] The problem is compounded by the fact that a spatially located being must have what J. C. A. Gaskin has called "a point of view" (*The Quest for Eternity: An Outline of the Philosophy of Religion* [Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1984], 112). Gaskin points out that there cannot be any non-perspectival seeing. One always sees things from a particular vantage point. Therefore it makes no sense to see or perceive something from all perspectives at once. Gaskin takes classical theism to be committed to holding that God does have this puzzling, all-perceiving sensory representation, what is sometimes called omnipercipience.

None of the solutions proffered for dealing with heterogeneous material simples seems plausible with respect to God's belief states. The solution differentiating between an object and the stuff of which it is made is obviously inapplicable to an immaterial entity. Spatially indexed properties will not work, for indexing the properties removes the indexicality of the belief states, and God clearly knows, "I am wholly here" as well as, "I am wholly-at-*r*." Adverbialism is implausible, not only because having a property *r*ly is parasitic on the more basic having *r*, but also because spatial locations are not plausibly ways of having something. Treating God's belief states as disguised three-place relations is implausible, for wherever he is God surely believes, "I am here" *simpliciter*. It is not clear what a distributional property of belief states for God wholly located at different disjoint regions would be. None of these concoctions is as plausible as thinking that in each spatial region the divine object wholly located there has the belief state, "I am here," where "here" is an indexical term referring to different places.

The only way for proponents of divine spatiality to avoid the problem of spatial intrinsics and the attendant polytheism, it seems, would be to maintain that God's spatial indexical belief states are not intrinsic to him. We thus recur to the bizarre externalism to which defenders of divine simplicity are forced.[193] To the contrary, no belief state is more plausibly intrinsic than the belief state, "I am here."

Taken together, these four problems should make Christian theists reluctant to adopt an interpretation of divine omnipresence in terms of God's occupying space.

Classical theism does not, *pace* Gaskin, attribute omnipercipience to God, since God transcends space and so does not perceive things from a particular angle. Omniscience is construed in terms of complete propositional knowledge, which does not include sensory representations. But suppose we hold with defenders of divine spatiality that God is wholly present simultaneously in every region of space. In that case it seems natural to think that he would have sensory representations of the universe from the perspective(s) of each region. But how could such diverse representations fit together into a coherent whole? Here I find myself sympathetic with Gaskin.

Charles Taliaferro, while holding to divine spacelessness, nevertheless tries to defend God's omnipercipience (*Consciousness and the Mind of God* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994], 259–262). He thinks that God could have indefinitely many distinct visual experiences from different perspectives simultaneously, so long as they do not overlap. Taliaferro's gambit seems to me to be a needless and perhaps futile defense of God's having sensory representations. Located in space and simultaneously seeing everything from every angle, why would God's sensory perceptions not overlap? Even multiple non-overlapping viewpoints like Taliaferro's analogy of multiple television screens would have to be simultaneously seen from a particular point of view.

The defender of divine spatiality might deny that God has sensory representations. After all, God has no eyes to see with, no ears to hear with, no nerve endings to feel with. But then why include God in space at all? He may as well be spaceless. One thinks in this connection of Isaac Newton's doctrine that space is, as it were, the sensorium of God. If God is wholly present at every spatial region, it seems natural that he would have simultaneously a representation of the universe from every standpoint. Otherwise he would be worse off than a man who is blind, deaf, and numb!

[193] Recall *supra*, 174–182.

8.5 Concluding Remarks

We have seen no good reason to embrace a construal of God's omnipresence as divine spatiality but some reason to accept instead divine aspatiality. The latter view commends itself very naturally in light of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. For we know, in virtue of the doctrine of creation, that God existing alone without creation is spaceless. For on a relational view of space, space does not exist in the utter absence of any physical reality, and on a substantival view of space, space is a thing or substance and therefore must have been created by God. In either case, then, God brings space into being at the moment of his creation of the universe. Contrary to Newton, space is not a necessary, concomitant effect of God but a contingent, freely willed effect. Sans the universe, therefore, God exists spacelessly. But the creation of space would do nothing to "spatialize" God, that is to say, to draw him into space. The creating of space is not itself a spatial act (as is, say, bumping something).[194] Hence, there is no reason to think that divine spacelessness is surrendered in the act of creation. If not, then God's omnipresence should be understood in terms of God's being immediately cognizant of and causally active at every place in space. He knows what is happening at every spatial location in the universe and he is causally operative at every such place, even if nothing more is going on there than quantum fluctuations in the vacuum of "empty" space.

God's spacelessness would be the functional equivalent of an embedding hyper-dimension of space. Just as a three-dimensional being could act in the two-dimensional plane in ways that would appear mysterious to the inhabitants of Flatland, so the transcendent God can act immediately at any point in our three-dimensional world. Charmed by this image, a few thinkers have even thought to construe God as literally a hyper-dimensional being existing in an embedding space-time. But this metaphysical extravagance actually gives up what has been achieved by our construing divine omnipresence in terms of spacelessness without accruing any new advantage. Talk of embedding hyper-space inhabited by God should be taken as an illustrative device without ontological significance. It seems best to say that God literally exists spacelessly but is present at every place in space in the sense that he is cognizant of and causally active at every place in space.[195]

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[194] On the distinction between words that imply spatiality and those not doing so see William Alston, "How to Think about Divine Action," in *Divine Action: Studies Inspired by the Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer*, ed. Brian Hebblethwaite and Edward Henderson (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 66–68; William P. Alston, "Divine and Human Action," in *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 261.

[195] I am indebted to Cody Gilmore, William Hasker, Hud Hudson, and Hayden Stephan for discussion of the issues raised in this section.

9
Omnipotence

Omnipotence is another case of a divine attribute where the confluence of solid biblical evidence and perfect being theology motivates extrapolating the biblical attribute to its maximal possible degree. Unfortunately, it is also one of the knottiest of the divine attributes to unravel. There has been a long history of failed attempts to formulate a coherent and intuitive definition of omnipotence. Since the 1950s there has been renewed interest in the subject.[1]

9.1 Biblical Data Concerning Divine Omnipotence

One of the most important of the biblical names for God is *'El-Shaddai* (God Almighty).[2] The name first appears in Gen 17, when the Lord appears to Abram to confirm his covenant with him and promise him a posterity, announcing, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless" (17.2; cf. Ex 6.3). The name is used 48 times in the OT, being translated by the LXX as *ho pantocratōr* and employed subsequently in the NT, for example, in Rev 19.6 in connection with the marriage supper of the

[1] So Erik J. Wielenberg, "Omnipotence," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021).
[2] On the antiquity and uncertain etymology of the name see Nahum Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 384–85. For a helpful survey of the biblical data concerning divine omnipotence see John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 279–283.

Systematic Philosophical Theology: On God: Attributes of God, Volume IIa, First Edition.
William Lane Craig.
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Lamb: "Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.'" The word gets translated in the Latin Vulgate as *omnipotens*, whence we derive our word "omnipotent."

As the NT term intimates, in Scripture God's almighty power is thought to be most manifested in the act of creation. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1.1). It is implied that God creates the world out of nothing. He has no need of any material substratum. In the Scriptures the divine act of *creatio ex nihilo* displays most vividly God's almighty power. "For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth" (Ps 33.9). His almighty word brings the universe into existence. The creation simply comes into being at the verbal command of the Lord. In Rom 4.17 Paul uses a striking phrase to characterize the God of Abraham, "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist." Here two mighty acts of God – the resurrection of Christ and the creation – are mentioned as superlative manifestations of his power.

Furthermore, the Scriptures indicate that God has the power to do anything. For example, when God's promise to Abraham and Sarah that they will have a child in their old age elicits laughter on Sarah's part, the Lord says, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (Gen 18.14a). The question is purely rhetorical. The answer is clearly, No, nothing is too hard for the Lord. In Jeremiah 32 we find a similar question and answer. "'Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh; is anything too hard for me?'" (vv. 26–27). Should there be any doubt about the answer to that question, v. 17 settles it: "Ah, LORD God! It is thou who hast made the heavens and the earth by thy great power and by thy outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for thee." Similarly, in the final scene of the book of Job, where Job realizes God's incomprehensible greatness and his own inability to fathom the power of God, Job exclaims, 'I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted'" (Job 42.2).

Such affirmations are not confined to the OT. In the annunciation to Mary the angel Gabriel assures her, "With God nothing will be impossible" (Lk 1.37). Jesus himself reassures his disciples, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Mt 19.26). Again, in the garden of Gethsemane Jesus prays, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mk 14.26). So we have the testimony of Scripture that God is almighty and can do all things.

Brian Leftow astutely observes that what we find in Scripture is testimony to both the power of God and to the range of things that God can

do. Leftow illustrates the difference between the two in order to make the distinction clear: "I might be physically and mentally strong enough to win a chess match, but be unable to do so because I do not know the rules. . . . Again, two people might be able to accomplish the same tasks; if one does them easily and the other strains to equal the first, there is a difference between them, which intuitively does not consist in the range of tasks they are able to perform."[3] This largely overlooked distinction not only will become important in trying to formulate an adequate doctrine of omnipotence but also yields insight into scriptural restrictions on the range of God's power.

For while Scripture affirms repeatedly that God can do all things and that no purpose of his can be thwarted, the Scripture also states bluntly, "When God desired to show more convincingly. . . the unchangeable character of his purpose, he interposed with an oath, so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God should prove false, we. . . might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us" (Heb 6.17). The passage exemplifies Leftow's distinction. It takes no more raw power to break a promise or violate an oath than to keep them, but God is too good to do such things, and so they are impossible for him, lying outside the range of things he can do. "If we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself" (II Tim 2.13). Similarly, when the prophet affirms, "the Glory of Israel will not lie or repent; for he is not a man, that he should repent" (I Sam 15.29; cf. Num 23.19), such a passage is naturally understood to mean that because of his essential character, rather than any sort of impotence, God cannot lie or repent. Abraham asked, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen 18.25), and Paul reacts in horror to the question, "Is there injustice on God's part?" (Rom 9.14). It was inconceivable that God could be evil – indeed, according to James, "God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one" (Jas 1.13). Doubtless, the authors of Scripture would have considered many other things as well to be impossible for God, such as bringing it about that he never existed, or his worshipping some other god, or his perishing.

Moreover, things certainly do happen contrary to God's will, so that his purposes are sometimes thwarted. For God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Tim 2.4), "not wishing

[3] Brian Leftow, "Omnipotence," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 167. This distinction was already drawn in Charles Taliaferro, "The Magnitude of Omnipotence," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 14, no. 2 (1983): 99–106, who distinguishes between "the scope of activities which can be performed and the way these are performed" (Charles Taliaferro, *Consciousness and the Mind of God* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994], 278).

that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (II Pet 3.9). Yet not all persons do find salvation (II Thess 1.89; Heb 10.26–30; II Pet 2.20–21). The fact that God desires universal salvation but that sinful men obdurately refuse his forgiveness and spurn him shows clearly that despite his awesome power some human decisions lie outside the range of what he can control (without abrogating human freedom). Not being philosophical theologians, the authors of Scripture seem untroubled by the *prima facie* contradiction between God's being able to do all things and God's inability to do various things that God is explicitly said not to be able to do. Scriptural affirmations of divine omnipotence are not philosophical formulations of doctrine but ordinary language expressions of religious belief. Our challenge will be to formulate a coherent doctrine of omnipotence and to see if such an attribute should be ascribed to the God of the Bible.

9.2 The Concept of Omnipotence

Like omniscience, omnipotence is a theologically neutral concept. We are not interested in a theologically loaded definition of "divine omnipotence," which might be quite different from a theologically neutral definition.[4] We can preserve the theological neutrality of our account of omnipotence by formulating our explications of omnipotence in terms of an arbitrary individual represented by the variable *S*, rather than God. If the concept of omnipotence turns out to be incoherent, then we should simply drop the term as inappropriate and use some other term like "almighty" to describe

[4] Thus, we should reject the requirement that "any adequate definition of omnipotence. . . be logically compatible with the claims essential to traditional Judeo-Christian theism concerning the other divine attributes" (Richard R. La Croix, "The Impossibility of Defining 'Omnipotence'," *Philosophical Studies* 32, no. 2 [1977]: 182). Such an idiosyncratic definition would evacuate the claim that God is omnipotent of virtually any theological and philosophical significance, especially in terms of comparative religions. If a neutral concept of omnipotence is incompatible with Christian theism, then the proper course is not to revise the definition but to reject the term as inapplicable to the Judeo-Christian God. Thus, it is incorrect to think that "Any successful account of omnipotence must somehow navigate a course" between "the Scylla of theological unacceptability" and "the Charybdis of essentially limited beings" (Erik J. Wielenberg, "Omnipotence Again," *Faith and Philosophy* 17, no. 1 [2000]: 27), for the first is irrelevant to the concept of omnipotence. For the same reason, Katherin Rogers is not to be followed in her abandoning the search to define what she (unfortunately) calls "secular omnipotence" in favor of defining "divine omnipotence" (Katherin Rogers, "An Anselmian Approach to Divine Omnipotence," in *T & T Clark Handbook of Analytic Theology,* ed. James M. Arcadi and James T. Turner [London: T & T Clark 2021], 104; cf. Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 189). A concept of omnipotence "whose explication is subject only to those nontheological constraints which emerge from a careful consideration of the ordinary notion of power and of the relation of power to other properties" (Thomas P. Flint and Alfred J. Freddoso, "Maximal Power," in *The Existence and Nature of God,* ed. Alfred J. Freddoso [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983], 83) should not, *pace* Flint and Freddoso, be characterized as secular but simply as theologically neutral.

the biblical God, as some philosophers have advised.[5] The biblical God is, after all, in no way diminished by the labels we give to his scripturally revealed attributes.

But, of course, as we have seen, we want to construe those biblical attributes in terms as superlative as possible. In determining whether "omnipotent" is a term appropriate to describe the biblical God, we shall inevitably be guided by perfect being theology, which, it will be remembered, enjoins us to construe the biblical attributes of God, which are underdetermined, as strongly as possible. Since power is paradigmatically a great-making property, all things considered, a maximally great being should be characterized by the maximal power possible.[6] The demands of perfect being theology require that God be not merely more powerful than any other being nor even incomprehensibly powerful but as powerful as it is possible to be. Therefore if a coherent doctrine of omnipotence is formulable and biblically consonant, omnipotence should be ascribed to God.

9.2.1 Maximal Degree of Power

Leftow rightly observes that most medieval and contemporary analyses of omnipotence focus on the range of things that an omnipotent agent can do, to the neglect of his power.[7] Although we might think at first blush that considerations pertinent to the degree of one's power are apt to be of little help in defining "omnipotence," since power is so vague and amorphous a notion, in fact a little reflection reveals that it is a crucial notion to adequately characterizing an omnipotent being, perhaps even more important than delineating the range of his power. Leftow explains,

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[5] Most notably Peter Geach, *Providence and Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 4. Flint and Freddoso comment, "The term 'almighty', as [Geach] uses it, expresses a properly religious concept, i.e., a concept whose explication is subject to overtly theological constraints. To say that God is almighty is to attribute to God all the power that a being with his nature can have" (Flint and Freddoso, "Maximal Power," 82–83). They agree with Geach that "almightiness and omnipotence are distinct properties," but they argue that "an adequate analysis of maximal power will show that God can be both almighty and omnipotent" (83).

[6] Daniel Hill observes that power is usually thought to be a great-making property because it is in virtue of their power that beings translate their desires into actuality. If there were two beings *x* and *y* that were exactly alike except that *x* in virtue of his power could actualize his desires whereas *y* could not, then *x* would be greater than *y*. "So, if it is greater to be more powerful than less powerful, then maximal power, i.e., a degree of power that cannot be exceeded, would seem to be a great-making property" (Daniel J. Hill, *Divinity and Maximal Greatness* [New York: Routledge, 2005], 125).

[7] Exceptions include Wielenberg, "Omnipotence Again," 37–44, and Hill, *Divinity and Maximal Greatness*, 125–126, 149–151, though Hill, despite a strong emphasis on the degree of power which *S* must possess in order to be omnipotent, often slides unconsciously into a discussion of the range of *S*'s power (134–146), perhaps due to his trying to "individuate active causal powers. . . by reference to states of affairs, which is certainly the most prominent strategy in the recent literature on this topic" (140).

> We can agree in advance of any detailed account of omnipotence that an omnipotent being is as powerful as it is possible to be: no one could be more powerful than someone omnipotent. But now consider two deities, Schmod and God. Schmod 'can do all things', but finds some of them hard (though not 'too hard'). God can do all Schmod can, but finds none of it hard. One legitimate explanation of this is that God is stronger. If someone is stronger than Schmod, Schmod is not omnipotent, even if Schmod 'can do all things'. If this is a coherent example, a definition of omnipotence needs to assure maximal strength; talk of range alone is inadequate.[8]

Power can come in degrees, and the degree of God's power, if not its extent, exceeds that of Schmod's. It may be that Schmod accomplishes some tasks only with great effort and exertion or perhaps only with extrinsic help, while God does such tasks solo and effortlessly. Schmod cannot therefore plausibly be called omnipotent, whatever the range of his abilities.

Intuitively, we should say that an omnipotent being has unlimited power, power that cannot possibly be exceeded. Although Flint and Freddoso entitled their range account of omnipotence "Maximal Power," such an appellation is more appropriate to a description of God's unlimited power.[9] Ironically, it is the agnostic philosopher Erik Wielenberg who has provided the most adequate and interesting account of omnipotence simply in terms of maximal power.[10] In Wielenberg's view, "it is. . . a mistake to try to explicate omnipotence in terms of which states of affairs a being can bring about,"[11] in other words, in terms of the range of its power. Such attempts mistakenly suppose that if some being *S* cannot bring about a state of affairs *s*, then *S* lacks the power to bring about *s*. But "the fact that a being is unable to bring about a particular state of affairs is not sufficient to prove that the being is not omnipotent. A further question must be asked: *why* is the being unable to bring about the state of affairs?"[12] If, for example, the state of affairs in question is logically impossible, then *S*'s inability to bring it about is not due to any lack of power on *S*'s part.

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[8] Leftow, "Omnipotence," 183.

[9] When I asked Flint and Freddoso soon after the publication of their article "Maximal Power" why they used that expression rather than "Omnipotence," they replied that it was merely to have a more interesting title. Flint had wanted to entitle the article "Great God Almighty," but Freddoso, unamused, objected to that title as "impious."

[10] Wielenberg, "Omnipotence Again," 37–44. Hill deems Wielenberg's account "the most promising afforded in the literature," enjoying as it does "a great deal of intuitive support" (Hill, *Divinity and Maximal Greatness*, 149–150). Leftow adopts Wielenberg's power account as one plank in his tripartite analysis of omnipotence (Leftow, "Omnipotence," 185, 190).

[11] Wielenberg, "Omnipotence Again," 38.

[12] Wielenberg, 39.

Daniel Hill therefore advocates analyzing omnipotence using the locution "has the power to" rather than locutions like "is able to" or "can" because the latter are ambiguous. Any omnipotent being would have the power, for example, to destroy the Eiffel Tower. So suppose that an omnipotent being exercised this power and destroyed it. Would he thereby have forfeited his power to destroy it? Surely not; he would thereby have forfeited only his *opportunity* to exercise this power.[13] Hill thinks that we should not take lack of opportunity, knowledge, or desire to be limits upon a being's power. He endorses the claim that *S* has the power to perform an action *A* if and only if, given the opportunity, know-how, and overriding desire to perform *A*, then *S* would perform *A*.[14]

In answer to his question as to why a being *S* is unable to bring about a specified state of affairs *s*, Wielenberg contends that such an inability counts against *S*'s omnipotence if and only if that inability is due to a lack of power on *S*'s part.[15] Wielenberg proposes the following explication of omnipotence:

> O. *S* is omnipotent if and only if it is not the case that there is some state of affairs *s*, such that *S* is unable to bring about *s* at least partially because of a lack of power in *S*.

Should *S*'s inability to actualize *s* arise wholly from factors other than *S*'s power, such as a lack of opportunity, know-how, or desire, then such inability does not count against *S*'s omnipotence. Wielenberg's (O) seems to offer a plausible explication of maximal power, as Hill observes: "This account has a great deal of intuitive support: if there is no state of affairs that [*S*] cannot bring about owing (at least partially) to lack of *power* then it looks as if [*S*]'s *power* is unlimited and, hence, that [*S*] is omnipotent. Conversely, if [*S*] is omnipotent then we expect [*S*]'s power to be unlimited and, hence, that there be no state of affairs such that [*S*] cannot bring it about owing (at least partially) to lack of *power*."[16]

Hill's emphases draw attention to the fact that Wielenberg's account is properly an account of maximal degree of power. Leftow maintains that as such it is adequate but nonetheless incomplete with respect to omnipotence.

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[13] Hill, *Divinity and Maximal Greatness*, 126–127.

[14] Hill, 127; cf. 178, where the principle is stated in terms of *S*'s power to actualize states of affairs rather than to perform actions. Leftow similarly holds that the ability to do a thing arises from at least three things more basic: having power enough, having knowledge enough, and having the desire to do it (Leftow, "Omnipotence," 186). Doubtless Leftow would include opportunity as well. Know-how could limit the range to logically possible states of affairs, since no one could know how to actualize a logically impossible state of affairs.

[15] Wielenberg, "Omnipotence Again," 39, 42.

[16] Hill, *Divinity and Maximal Greatness*, 149.

He maintains that we must consider the range of *S*'s power as well. For if *S* is in some way essentially limited in his range of actions, he may be unable to utilize his great power to actualize certain states of affairs which intuitively an omnipotent being ought to be able to bring about.[17]

Wielenberg's account at least affords the systematic theologian a way of explicating God's almightiness, should a coherent formulation of omnipotence elude us. One may affirm that in terms of its degree the biblical God's power is unlimited and that in terms of its range his power does not encompass a provided list of exceptions: *a, b, c,* etc. Such an ad hoc formulation will not delimit for us the range of God's power but simply inform us as to certain things lying outside that range, such as breaking his promises, violating his oaths, tempting someone to do evil, and so on. We can affirm that God is unlimited in power even though he is unable to do such things.

9.2.2 Maximal Range of Power

Is an adequate range account of omnipotence available to us? Some have despaired of ever finding such an account; but their frustration was occasioned by the demand that such an account be theologically adequate.[18] It seemed that in order for God to count as omnipotent, he would, for example, have to be able to perform actions which only an evil being could do. Given God's essential goodness, he is unable to perform such actions, even though he has the power to do so. There could therefore be a being as equally powerful as God but with a greater range of power, so that God does not count as omnipotent. Now if this line of argument is sound, it follows only that the theologian should discard the term "omnipotence" with respect to God, not conclude that an explication of omnipotence cannot be given.

9.2.2.1 Conditions of Adequacy on a Range Account

Flint and Freddoso provide a useful list of five conditions of adequacy for any range account of omnipotence:

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[17] Leftow, "Omnipotence," 185. Leftow has in mind the imagined Mr. McEar (to be discussed below), who is essentially able only to scratch his left ear. He may have unlimited power but is unacceptably restricted in his range of power. Wielenberg replies that McEar's restricted ability is plausibly due to a lack of power on his part, since we know that, as an ordinary human being, he also lacks the power to, for example, destroy the earth. But Wielenberg grants that in his own imagined illustration of a hypothetical series of declining deities each deity may count as omnipotent, despite their having differing abilities. This fact seems to underline the desirability, at least, of supplementing Wielenberg's power account with some range account of omnipotence as well.

[18] For example, Nelson Pike, "Omnipotence and God's Ability to Sin," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (1969): 208–216; Geach, *Providence and Evil*; La Croix, "Defining 'Omnipotence'," 182–183.

1. *An analysis of omnipotence should be stated in terms of an agent's ability to actualize or bring about states of affairs.*[19] The alternative of analyzing omnipotence in terms of ability to perform tasks is widely recognized to generate unnecessary difficulties. For example, if we say that *S* is omnipotent just in case *S* can perform any logically possible task, then we rule out, say, Zeus' being omnipotent simply on the grounds that Zeus cannot perform the logically possible task of saying something which is being said only by Jones. Such an analysis seems unduly restrictive. By contrast on a state of affairs account, the state of affairs of *Zeus' saying something which is being said only by Jones* is logically impossible, and thus unproblematically not within anyone's ability to actualize.
2. *An omnipotent being should be expected to have the ability to actualize a state of affairs* s *only if it is logically possible that someone actualize* s. Flint and Freddoso will argue that there are logically possible states of affairs that no one can actualize and so *S*'s inability to actualize them does not count against his omnipotence. Notice that (2) states only a necessary not a sufficient condition of omnipotence.
3. *Any adequate account of omnipotence must be relativized to a possible world* W *and a time* t. Thus, our *analysandum* should be "*S* is omnipotent at *t* in *W*." Flint and Freddoso state that this condition rests on the metaphysical presuppositions that (i) states of affairs are tensed and (ii) time travel is logically impossible. Although I embrace both of these presuppositions and therefore, unlike some,[20] find them unproblematic, they seem to be overstated. For even if states of affairs are not tensed, so long as it is even metaphysically possible that time and, hence, states of affairs are tensed, one needs to take cognizance of such worlds in one's analysis of omnipotence. As regards time travel, the difficulty here, as we have seen,[21] is that divine foreknowledge has, or can have, many of the same consequences for the necessity of the past as time travel. Even if we rule out time travel on the grounds that temporal becoming is essential to any temporal world, we cannot on that ground rule out divine foreknowledge of future contingents. The logical impossibility of divine foreknowledge is certainly not a condition of adequacy on omnipotence, even if temporal necessity turns out not to amount to

[19] Flint and Freddoso actually speak of an agent's "power"; but if we are going to distinguish range from power, we need to speak of an agent's ability, since an agent may have the power to actualize a state of affairs but lack the opportunity, know-how, or possible desire to do so and so be unable to do so.
[20] For example, Graham Oppy, "Omnipotence," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 71, no. 1 (2005): 72. Although Oppy complains that not many non-theists would be attracted to Flint and Freddoso's assumptions, that fact would not disqualify their account from being theologically neutral.
[21] See *supra*, 242–245.

very much if God foreknows the future.[22] An account of omnipotence should still take cognizance of the fact that there may be certain hard facts about the past that no one can now bring about.

4. *An omnipotent being should have the ability to actualize a state of affairs* s *only if* s *obtains in some world in which the same world-type-for-*S *is true*. A world-type-for-*S* is all the true counterfactuals of freedom concerning any person other than *S*. Any adequate analysis of omnipotence must take account of the logically inescapable limitations which true counterfactuals of freedom place on an omnipotent agent. Since it is logically impossible for any agent to escape this type of limitation, such a limitation cannot disqualify a being from counting as omnipotent. So in assessing *S*'s omnipotence in *W*, one will restrict one's attention only to worlds sharing the same world-type-for-*S* as *W*.
5. *No being should be considered omnipotent if it lacks the range of ability which it is clear an omnipotent agent ought to possess*. In other words, one's analysis of omnipotence must not be too weak in its demands as well as not be too strong. An omnipotent being must have the maximal range of power consistent with the first four conditions.

9.2.2.2 Failed Accounts

Can we find an account of omnipotence that satisfies these conditions? Wielenberg lists a number of naïve accounts of the range of God's power that may be disqualified. Most broadly,

(D_1) *S* is omnipotent $=_{\text{def.}}$ *S* can bring about any state of affairs.

The obvious problem with (D_1) is that it requires as a condition of being omnipotent that *S* can bring about states of affairs which are strictly logically impossible, like there being a triangle which is not a triangle, which violates condition (2). Curiously, rather than rejecting (D_1) as unreasonable, Wielenberg says that it is "unacceptable for theological reasons," since it would imply that God is not omnipotent.[23] Now even if that were true, that would not show that (D_1), being a theologically neutral definition, is unacceptable.

[22] Flint and Freddoso rightly note that if time traveling "is coherent, it may not be incompatible with our analysis of maximal power, since our third condition of adequacy is simply that an account of omnipotence should accommodate the (epistemic) possibility that there are purely temporal restrictions on the power of an omnipotent agent" (Flint and Freddoso, "Maximal Power," 89). They go on to say, "our third condition of adequacy does not by itself rule out the possibility that someone have the power to bring about (as opposed to alter) the past" (90).

[23] Wielenberg, "Omnipotence Again," 26–27.

And, how, we wonder, does Wielenberg know that God cannot bring about a metaphysically impossible state of affairs? Descartes was apparently willing to affirm that divine omnipotence entails that God can do literally anything – including actualizing logically impossible states of affairs.[24] Such a view has been construed as affirming universal possibilism, the doctrine that there are no necessary truths.[25] For on Descartes' view an omnipotent deity could have brought it about that even logical contradictions be true and tautologies be false, as inconceivable as this may seem to us. But such a doctrine seems incoherent. For is the proposition *There are no necessary truths* itself necessarily true or not? If so, then the position is self-refuting. If not, then that proposition is possibly false, that is to say, God could have brought it about that there are necessary truths. We may then say that there is, therefore, a possible world in which God brings it about that there are propositions which are true in every possible world. But if there are such propositions, then there is no world in which it is the case that there are no propositions true in every possible world, that is, it is not possible that there are no necessary truths, which contradicts universal possibilism.

Moreover, Descartes' position is incredible. It asks us to believe, for example, that God could have brought it about that he created all of us without his existing, that is to say, there is a possible world in which both God does not exist and he created all of us. This is simply inane. The vast majority of philosophical theologians have therefore maintained that God's being omnipotent does not require his ability to bring about logically impossible states of affairs. So, for example, Thomas Aquinas writes,

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[24] See *Descartes: Philosophical Letters*, trans. and ed. Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 10–15, 150–151. To Mersenne, Descartes wrote:

> "You ask also what necessitated God to create these truths; and I reply just as he was free not to create the world, so he was no less free to make it untrue that all the lines drawn from the center of a circle to its circumference are equal. And it is certain that these truths are no more necessarily attached to his essence than other creatures are" (May 27, 1630).

To Mesland, Descartes wrote:

> "I turn to the difficulty of how it was free and indifferent for God to make it not be true that the three angles of a triangle were equal to two right angles, or in general that contradictories could not be true together. It is easy to dispel this difficulty by considering that the power of God cannot have any limits and that our mind is finite and so created as to be able to conceive as possible things which God has wished to be in fact possible, but not to be able to conceive as possible things which God could have made possible, but which he has in fact wished to make impossible" (May 2, 1644).

[25] Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), 100–103. Plantinga distinguishes this from limited possibilism, the doctrine that God has freely decreed which truths are necessary. This raises the question of theistic activism, to be discussed briefly below.

> All confess that God is omnipotent; but it seems difficult to explain in what his omnipotence precisely consists: for there may be doubt as to the precise meaning of the word 'all' when we say that God can do all things. If, however, we consider the matter aright, since power is said in reference to possible things, this phrase, *God can do all things*, is rightly understood to mean that God can do all things that are possible; and for this reason he is said to be omnipotent.[26]

The inadequacy of (D_1) is evident, not merely because it is theologically unacceptable, but more fundamentally because it is self-referentially incoherent and incredible.

Aquinas' statement suggests a second formulation:

> (D_2) *S* is omnipotent $=_{\text{def.}}$ *S* can bring about any state of affairs that is metaphysically possible.

Wielenberg points out that the state of affairs *the Earth's being laid waste by a flood* is a metaphysically possible state of affairs which God cannot bring about, since he has promised never to do so again and God cannot break his promises. Once again, Wielenberg draws the inappropriate conclusion that (D_2) is "theologically unacceptable" rather than the conclusion that omnipotence so defined is not a property appropriately ascribed to the God of the Bible.[27] Wielenberg should have indicted (D_2) as philosophically inadequate because its condition is too strong. For there are metaphysically possible states of affairs which, intuitively, even an omnipotent being cannot bring about. For example, *the Cubs' winning the 1968 World Series* describes a metaphysically possible state of affairs; but it is no longer possible to actualize this state of affairs, at least directly. To actualize directly such a state of affairs now would be tantamount to changing the past or to backward causation, both of which are plausibly broadly logically impossible. Therefore, the inability of *S* to actualize directly such a state of affairs at this time should not count against *S*'s omnipotence. Wielenberg's own example is really about the causal closedness of the past: God's oath in now past and so cannot be directly affected by present actions.

But could *S* perhaps now act in such a way so as to actualize such past states of affairs indirectly?[28] Suppose there were some action *A* which *S*

[26] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.25.3.

[27] Wielenberg, "Omnipotence Again," 27.

[28] See Flint and Freddoso, "Maximal Power," 93, 104–106. Thus it is too quick to say with Oppy that an omnipotent being is "limited by the fact that it is at a certain point in the causal order: it cannot 'undo' the prior causal order" (Oppy, "Omnipotence," 60). Similarly, Leftow inaccurately thinks that the thought behind Flint and Freddoso's requirement that two worlds share the same history is that "it is now impossible to bring about anything incompatible with the past's having been as it was: if it was the case that *P*, now or in the future nothing can occur that entails that it was the case that ¬*P*" (Leftow, "Omnipotence," 182).

could take, and if *S* were to take *A*, then God would have foreknown this and brought about a Cubs victory in 1968. Then *S* would now seem to have the power to actualize the state of affairs *the Cubs' winning the 1968 World Series* indirectly. Whether *S* in fact has such a power depends on whether certain "backtracking" counterfactuals, that is, counterfactuals which involve the past's being different than it was, happen to be true. To recall Wielenberg's example of the flood, it may be the case that it is possible that God bring about a devastating flood to once again judge the Earth, but that if he were to do so, then he would not have promised in the past never to do so again. Call past states of affairs which are indirectly actualizable by someone the "soft" past and states which are not indirectly actualizable by someone the "hard" past. Accordingly, in accord with condition (3) our analysis of omnipotence must take account of the fact that *S*'s omnipotence does not imply the ability to actualize states of affairs inconsistent with the hard past.

Or consider the state of affairs of *Plato's freely writing a dialogue*.[29] This is, or at least was, a metaphysically possible state of affairs, one that Plato could actualize. Yet given Plato's libertarian freedom, Hill points out, this state of affairs may not be actualizable by anyone other than Plato. While an omnipotent being could cause Plato to write a dialogue, his doing so would be inconsistent with Plato's freely writing that dialogue. So the condition that *S*, in order to be omnipotent, must have the power to actualize any metaphysically possible state of affairs seems to be too strong.

Once again, however, things are not so simple. Whether an omnipotent being has the power to actualize Plato's freely writing a dialogue will depend on the circumstances of Plato's writing and the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom that are true. If *S* is endowed with middle knowledge, then it may well be the case that he can actualize Plato's freely writing a dialogue by actualizing the state of affairs described in the antecedent of the relevant counterfactual; on the other hand this may lie outside the range of *S*'s power, given the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom that are true (the world-type-for-*S*). Therefore our explication of omnipotence cannot require of *S* the ability to actualize just any metaphysically possible state of affairs but must, in accord with condition (4), take account of true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom.

Third, Wielenberg considers

> (D_3) *S* is omnipotent $=_{\text{def.}}$ *S* can bring about any state of affairs which is metaphysically possible for *S* to bring about.

As a counterexample to (D_3), Wielenberg invites us to imagine a fairly minor deity that is essentially capable of bringing about only and all states

[29] See Hill, *Divinity and Maximal Greatness*, 143–146.

of affairs in which gray objects exist.[30] Since this deity can bring about any state of affairs that it is metaphysically possible for him to bring about, he would qualify as omnipotent, which is perverse. The conditions laid down by (D_3) are thus too weak, in violation of condition (5).

Wielenberg's example is a variation on a beloved figure in the literature on omnipotence, "the notorious weakling Mr. McEar,"[31] a man who is essentially capable only of scratching his left ear (as well as all actions implied thereby, such as moving his fingers). Contemporary accounts of the range of omnipotence have had a difficult time excluding Mr. McEar from qualifying as omnipotent, despite his evident incapacity, since he can do everything that it is metaphysically possible for him to do. It is generally agreed that Mr. McEar served to subvert the carefully articulated analysis of omnipotence offered by Edward Wierenga.[32] Wierenga does respond, rightly I think, that a Mr. McEar is doubtless metaphysically impossible.[33] For it would be trivially easy for God to add to Mr. McEar's repertoire of powers. It must not be forgotten that as Christian philosophical theologians, we approach this topic with an interest in learning whether the God we worship should be characterized as omnipotent, in the same way that he should be characterized as necessary, self-existent, eternal, omniscient, and so on. We are not in ignorance of his reality. Mr. McEar is thus metaphysically impossible.

Rather the example of Mr. McEar serves to illustrate the more general problem that any being, even God, is going to have essential limitations, and some of these limitations may preclude such a being from qualifying as omnipotent.[34] As Oppy puts it, "all that the objector needs is the claim

[30] Or no objects at all (Wielenberg, "Omnipotence Again," 27).

[31] Flint and Freddoso, "Maximal Power," 84. On the interesting provenance of McEar, see the informative note by Leftow, "Omnipotence," 192n31.

[32] Edward Wierenga, *The Nature of God: An Inquiry into Divine Attributes* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), chap. 1, esp. p. 25.

[33] Wierenga, *Nature of God*, 29. Oppy likewise opines, "To these suggestions, Wierenga. . . makes the plausible reply that it is not possible that there are such beings" (Oppy, "Omnipotence," 78). The same verdict applies to Wielenberg's imagined series of solitary deities each increasingly impaired in its ability to create objects of various colors. For Wielenberg's hypothesis of solitary deities is incompatible with God's necessary existence. Although Wielenberg adds in an endnote, "My choice of worlds that are empty but for a single deity is to a certain extent arbitrary. As far as I can see, nothing in the argument depends upon each world being empty aside from a given deity" (Wielenberg, "Omnipotence Again," 45n19), Wielenberg, in fact, needs that stipulation, lest God possibly add to their color-creating powers.

[34] See Wielenberg, "Omnipotence Again," 31; Hill, *Divinity and Maximal Greatness,* 136–137, 147–148; Oppy, "Omnipotence," 78; Leftow, "Omnipotence," 172–174; Joshua Hoffman and Gary Rosencrantz, "Omnipotence," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Spring 2020 Edition), §4 "Omnipotence and the Shared Histories Approach," https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/omnipotence. We need not appeal to fanciful examples like Mr. McEar or Wielenberg's declining deities, since realistic examples are readily at hand. A porpoise, for example, is essentially incapable of flight, and were God to confer upon a porpoise the power of flight, that would be an essential change. Wielenberg, Hill, and Leftow also object to Wierenga's claim that for any agent who lacks certain abilities, it is possible that God give it those abilities, for God cannot confer on himself the power to do morally wrong acts, to err and to die, and to actualize states of affairs involving libertarian free choices like Plato's freely writing a dialogue in a specified set of circumstances. Leftow argues persuasively that it is also metaphysically impossible that there be a deity contingently one power short of omnipotence, for were God to confer that power on it, it would become God, which is impossible. Thus every non-divine being must be essentially limited (Leftow, "Omnipotence," 173–74).

that it is possible for some being to satisfy two conditions: (i) that there are essential limitations on what it can do; and (ii) that it has within its power the ability to strongly actualise all of those states of affairs that it is logically possible for it to strongly actualise."[35] The question is whether there are possibly beings which are plausibly not omnipotent but which exploit the full range of their essentially limited powers, so that it is metaphysically impossible for them to have a wider range of powers. It does not seem that we can preclude this possibility. Therefore, one cannot frame an adequate analysis of *S*'s omnipotence in terms of what *S* himself can actualize but must rather speak in terms of what someone can actualize.

9.2.2.3 Flint–Freddoso Account

A more sophisticated account of the range of God's power is therefore needed. Although there are several proposals in the literature, we shall focus our attention upon one of the more promising, namely, Flint and Freddoso's own account, which, they claim, successfully meets the five stated conditions of adequacy. Their own formulation of their analysis is quite complicated,[36] but it can be expressed more simply as follows: for any agent *S*, possible world *W*, time *t*, and state of affairs *s*,

> *S* is omnipotent at *t* in *W* iff [*S* has the power at *t* in *W* to actualize *s* if there is some world *W** sharing with *W* both the same history at *t* and the same world-type-for-*S* in which someone actualizes *s* at *t*].

We can simplify further by focusing on what it is for *S* to be omnipotent in the actual world:

> *S* is omnipotent at *t* iff [*S* has the power at *t* to actualize *s* if there is some world having both the same history at *t* and the same world-type-for-*S* as the actual world in which someone actualizes *s* at *t*].

Flint and Freddoso's account relies upon a couple of crucial notions that merit explanation.

First is the notion of two worlds' sharing a history. As we saw in our discussion of divine omniscience, Freddoso's concept of a world's history, developed in his account of temporal necessity, is emphatically not the

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[35] Oppy, "Omnipotence," 78.

[36] Flint and Freddoso, "Maximal Power," 99, state:

> (D) *S* is omnipotent at *t* in *W* if and only if for any state of affairs *p* and world-type-for-*S* *Ls* such that *p* is not a member of *Ls*, if there is a world *W** such that
> (i) *Ls* is true in both *W* and *W**, and
> (ii) *W** shares the same history with *W* at *t*, and
> (iii) at *t* in *W** someone actualizes *p*,
> then *S* has the power at *t* in *W* to actualize *p*.

historian's concept of history.[37] Rather a world's history is a series of temporally ordered submoments, each comprised of the immediate propositions that are true at *t* in *W*.[38] An immediate proposition *p* is an atomic, non-quantified, present-tense proposition that is temporally indifferent, that is to say, such that either *p* is not logically contingent or else *p*, like not-*p*, can be true at a first, a last, or an intermediate moment of time. Two worlds share the same history at *t* just in case they have identical submoments, obtaining in the same order, prior to *t*. It is a consequence of Freddoso's concept of a history that states of affairs such as Isaiah's prophesying the fall of Jerusalem and Daniel's dreaming that Babylon would be overthrown are not part of our world's history.

The inclusion of the stipulation that *W* and *W** share the same history at *t* is needed to meet condition (3) of adequacy. For many philosophers have held that the past is in some sense necessary and that there are therefore purely temporal restrictions upon the power of any agent. It may be too late for even an omnipotent agent to actualize some states of affairs. In order to accommodate the (epistemic) possibility that there are purely temporal restrictions on the power of an omnipotent agent, one's account of omnipotence must be indexed to a world and a time. Flint and Freddoso satisfy condition (3) by claiming that an omnipotent agent should be expected to have the power at *t* in *W* to actualize *s* only if there is a world *W** such that (i) *W** shares the same history with *W* at *t* and (ii) at *t* in *W** someone actualizes *s*.

Second is the notion of a world-type-for-*S*, which plays a crucial role in Flint's account of divine middle knowledge.[39] A world-type-for-*S* comprises all true counterfactuals of freedom over which *S* has no control because they involve the libertarian free decisions of others. Following Alvin Plantinga, Flint and Freddoso distinguish between strong and weak actualization of a state of affairs. An agent *S* strongly actualizes a state of affairs *s* just in case *S* causally determines that *s* obtains, that is to say, *S* does something which in conjunction with other operative causal factors constitutes a sufficient causal condition for *s*'s obtaining. Since it is logically impossible to causally determine another person's free decision, an omnipotent agent cannot be expected to have the power to strongly actualize others' libertarian free decisions. In the case of weak actualization, an agent can bring about the free decisions of others by strongly or weakly bringing it about

[37] See *supra*, 240–241.
[38] In "Maximal Power," 92, Flint and Freddoso speak instead of states of affairs rather than propositions. This could be relevant to Leftow's claim (see note 41) that counterfactuals of freedom belong to submoments.
[39] SeeThomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

that another agent S' is in a situation C, where it is true that if S' were in C, then S' would freely act in a specified way. In other words, by exploiting his knowledge of true counterfactuals of freedom an omnipotent agent would have the power to actualize states of affairs involving the libertarian decisions of others. So Flint and Freddoso take the term "actualize" in their analysis to include both strong and weak actualization. "This underscores nicely the impressive nature of maximal power, extending as it does even to the free actions of others."[40]

Given the world-type-for-*S*, however, *S* will not able to weakly actualize states of affairs involving the free decisions of others unless such states are described in consequents of true counterfactuals of freedom. It is not possible both that the counterfactuals of freedom requisite for weak actualization of certain states of affairs are false, that is to say, not part of *S*'s world-type, and that *S* actualizes such a state of affairs weakly or strongly. Since this is a purely logical restriction on *S*'s ability to actualize such states of affairs, such inability should not disqualify *S* from counting as omnipotent. Hence, Flint and Freddoso's account acknowledges the logically inescapable limitations which counterfactuals of freedom would place on an omnipotent agent by requiring that the relevant worlds share not only the same history but also the same world-type-for-*S*.[41]

Leftow draws attention to the fact that Flint and Freddoso circumvent the problem posed by Mr. McEar by speaking of *someone's* actualizing *s* rather than *S*'s actualizing *s*. But he complains that their analysis is still vulnerable to the counter-example that he calls Lonely McEar, who exists only in worlds in which he is the sole agent.[42] Lonely McEar would come out as omnipotent on Flint and Freddoso's analysis. But I should remind us once again that as Christian philosophical theologians, we approach this topic from a Christian point of view with an interest in determining whether the God we believe in should be characterized as omnipotent. In that case, beings like Lonely McEar are metaphysically impossible, since God exists in every possible world. Although Leftow complains that it is not clearly legitimate to invoke God's necessary existence to block appeal to Lonely

[40] Flint and Freddoso, "Maximal Power," 86.

[41] Leftow thinks that once we have stipulated that *W* and *W** must share the same history, it becomes superfluous to add that they must share the same world-type-for-*S*, since any true counterfactuals of freedom satisfy Freddoso's conditions for being members of a submoment (Leftow, "Omnipotence," 175). It is not clear that this is correct because Freddoso, in characterizing the submoments of a history, stipulates that the propositions or states of affairs constituting a submoment must be atomic, present-tense propositions or states. I doubt that he had counterfactual conditionals in mind. In any case, the requirement that *W* and *W** share not only a history but also the world-type-for-*S* is needed to guarantee that there are true counterfactuals of freedom rather than counterfactuals which are uniformly false or characterized by truth value gaps, as some have claimed, in which case they would not be included in a world's history.

[42] Leftow, 182.

McEar, I can see no reason whatever for thinking that the Christian systematic theologian should affect agnosticism with respect to what he believes about God's existence and nature.

Some critics have raised objections to Flint and Freddoso's account on the basis of *S*'s ability to actualize certain conjunctive and disjunctive states of affairs.[43] Although Leftow has offered substantive responses challenging these counter-examples,[44] it seems to me that such cases are merely concocted technicalities that are better ruled out by stipulation. When Flint and Freddoso spoke of "any state of affairs *p*," they were likely not thinking of conjunctive or disjunctive states of affairs but of atomic states of affairs.[45] So these sorts of objections can be avoided, it seems, simply by stipulating that *s* is an atomic state of affairs.

Oppy also objects that Flint and Freddoso's account allows that *S* could be omnipotent even though he cannot bring about states of affairs which several finite agents acting in concert could actualize, so long as any one of them cannot. Oppy writes, "Suppose that S is omnipotent at t in W. Suppose further that, leaving S aside, there is no agent in W who, acting alone, can bring it about that p in any world W* that shares its history with W, but that there is a group of agents in W who, acting together, can bring it about that p in some world W* that shares its history with W."[46] We may wonder, *why does Oppy require that the hypothetical agent (or agents) exist in W? Is it not enough that he or they exist in W*?* The answer is unclear, but perhaps it is due to the stipulation that *W** share the same history with *W*. While by a world's "history" one does not mean the past sequence of causally connected events, and while on Molinism there may be people who existed in the past who are not part of our world's "history" because they are in some way future-dependent, nonetheless requiring *W* and *W** to share the same "history" might seem to unduly restrict the agents available. It is hardly a

[43] Joshua Hoffman and Gary Rosenkrantz, "Omnipotence Redux," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 49, no. 2 (1988): 297–300; Jerome I. Gellman, "The Limits of Maximal Power," *Philosophical Studies* 55, no. 3 (1989): 329–336; Oppy, "Omnipotence," 72–73.

[44] Leftow, "Omnipotence," 175–179. In particular, Leftow effectively challenges Hoffman and Rosenkrantz's assumption that in the case of a conjunctive state of affairs *p&q*, *S* can bring about *p&q* by bringing about just one of its conjuncts. Oppy's counter-examples do not rely on this assumption; but Leftow argues that Oppy has failed to show that an omnipotent being is unable to bring about the problem conjuncts and disjuncts. The difficulty here is that Leftow is talking about counterfactuals with incompletely specified antecedents rather than counterfactuals of freedom, strictly speaking. As he notes on page 195 note 44, Flint's studied view is that agents, including God, do not bring about the truth of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom; rather they have the ability to weakly actualize and, hence, bring about the states of affairs described in the counterfactuals' consequents. Oppy also errs in thinking that Jones has the power to bring about the truth of counterfactuals of freedom about him rather than the truth of their consequents. Better simply to exclude the gerrymandered states of affairs from our analysis.

[45] Though, admittedly, they do briefly entertain the actualization of a conjunctive state of affairs on page 100 of "Maximal Power."

[46] Oppy, "Omnipotence," 74.

sufficient condition of omnipotence that if some finite agent in the actual world can actualize *p* at *t* in *W**, so can God! But Flint and Freddoso's definition countenances agents at *t* in *W** who first exist at *t* and so are not part of *W**'s history. That would allow two worlds to share the same history at *t* and yet for there to be agents of virtually unlimited power at *t* in *W** who do not exist in *W*. To be omnipotent *S* would need to have as much power at *t* in *W* as any such agent. In that case, it would solve Oppy's objection concerning groups of agents who can collectively bring about a state of affairs that no solo agent can bring about. For if we are allowing any possible agent who exists for the first time at *t* in *W**, then he can have as much power as any group of agents we care to imagine. So the objection fails.[47]

Unfortunately, Leftow thinks that the Flint–Freddoso account still has problems. He invites us to suppose that Whitehead's panpsychist metaphysics is true. In that case everything, even quarks, would be conscious and require divine persuasion. "Whitehead's God, in effect, can't do anything directly or on his own but talk to others. . . . Thus if Whitehead had the necessary metaphysical truth about the nature of things, his deity could well come out omnipotent" on Flint and Freddoso's account.[48] I repeat that as Christian philosophical theologians we are not examining the question of omnipotence from a metaphysically neutral perspective. We believe that the God of the Bible exists. That presupposition rules out the metaphysical possibility of Whiteheadian metaphysics. The objection is therefore fanciful.

Leftow's more important objection is that the range of an omnipotent being's power ought to be defined solely in terms of what he can strongly actualize.[49] Leftow does not deny that an omnipotent being has the power to weakly actualize states of affairs but contends that what states of affairs he can actualize weakly are irrelevant to the range of his power.

In support of this surprising contention Leftow argues first that omnipotence requires the greatest possible range of power to actualize states of affairs strongly at *t*. This point, even if conceded, does nothing of itself to support Leftow's main contention that weak actualization is irrelevant to the range of an omnipotent being's power. But should we grant the point? Leftow's argument in support of this contention is rather difficult

[47] Leftow also rightly observes that the informal quantificational expression "someone actualizes" in Flint and Freddoso's analysis should be symbolized $(\exists x)$ (x actualizes. . .), which may be understood as "there is at least one" (Leftow, "Omnipotence," 177; cf. 175 at the top). Leftow also makes the point that Flint and Freddoso's analysis permits the existence of "other operative causal factors" (like other agents) contributing to a sufficient causal condition for *s*'s obtaining, in which case we may symbolize "someone actualizes" as $(!\exists x)$ (x actualizes . . .), signifying one agent.

[48] Leftow, 180.

[49] Leftow, 180–181.

to interpret, but the point seems to be that Flint and Freddoso's account fails to specify the range of states of affairs that *S* can strongly actualize and the range of states that he can weakly actualize. It speaks only of the total range of *S*'s ability to actualize without differentiation between strong and weak actualization. Leftow thinks that this account allows that the ratio between states that an omnipotent being might be able to actualize strongly or weakly can vary. So long as the total range is maximal, *S* counts as omnipotent. Leftow complains that a being that can strongly actualize certain states of affairs is more powerful than a being that can actualize those same states of affairs only weakly by persuading free agents to do them or perhaps by manipulating them into doing them by the use of counterfactuals of freedom. Since both would count as omnipotent on the Flint–Freddoso account, there could be a being more powerful than an omnipotent being, which is absurd.

This complaint is far from compelling. The Flint–Freddoso account simply does not address the ratio question, so it does not exclude that there is a maximally powerful ratio unknown and perhaps even undeterminable by us. Leftow himself acknowledges in response to Oppy that "'strongly actualizes' is an artificial, technical term, without an established sense to violate, and without this, it's not clear what intuitions we really have on the subject."[50] Moreover, weak actualization can be even more impressive than strong actualization. A Molinist God endowed with middle knowledge and, hence, the ability to actualize states of affairs by exploiting true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom is breath-takingly powerful compared to a God who brings about states of affairs by raw causal power. The intention of Flint and Freddoso's Molinist-inspired account is clearly that weak actualization applies exclusively to states of affairs that cannot be strongly actualized, such as libertarian free decisions. We can ensure that God has the widest possible range of strong actualization by adding a condition like Wielenberg's that there is no state which God cannot strongly actualize due at least partially to a lack of power.

Leftow also argues that the Flint–Freddoso account allows one omnipotent being to be more powerful than another in a second way: there could be two beings satisfying the account's conditions for omnipotence, only one of which had the ability to render true various counterfactuals of freedom. Leftow is apparently thinking of a case in which *S* could influence the truth of a counterfactual by altering the antecedent conditions. But such a case concerns a counterfactual with an incompletely specified antecedent. Once the antecedent is fully specified, as in a counterfactual of creaturely

[50] Leftow, 178.

freedom, then even an omnipotent being cannot bring about the truth of such a counterfactual at will.

Be that as it may, Leftow proceeds to his main contention: omnipotence should be explicated in terms of strong actualization alone. First, since "persuade" is a success term, the ability to persuade someone is not intrinsic but depends on what is the case outside the agent. But omnipotence is an intrinsic attribute. An omnipotent being should not need the help of extrinsic circumstances to give it its power to achieve its effects. If those extrinsic circumstances are contingent, then in addition to broadly logical limits the absence of those circumstances would be another impeding factor to which to an omnipotent being would be subject. The moral, Leftow concludes, is that no being is omnipotent if powers of this sort are relevant to whether one is omnipotent. Indeed, Leftow goes so far as to assert, "If there are true CFs, and an omnipotent being does not wholly control their truth-value, these are contingent and can impede its will too. I suggest that the right conclusion here is that a Molinist God cannot be omnipotent."[51]

Notice that Leftow's anti-Molinist conclusion does not follow if he is correct that strong actualization alone counts towards omnipotence. For Leftow agrees that it is logically impossible for God to strongly actualize the free decisions of libertarian creatures. So if one agrees with Leftow that extrinsic circumstances are irrelevant to omnipotence, then one can consistently affirm that there are contingently true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom that impede God's will and that God is (intrinsically) omnipotent. At most it would follow that the Molinist should adopt an account of omnipotence in terms of strong actualization alone.

But should we agree with that restriction? Clearly not, I think. As Flint and Freddoso are wont to emphasize, the true world-type-for-God imposes no non-logical limits on his power. The truth of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom cannot be controlled by God because it is logically impossible for him to strongly actualize the free choices of the libertarian agents described in their consequents. When Leftow complains that the ability to persuade should not be relevant to omnipotence, he seems to have forgotten the distinction between the degree and the range of one's power. We may agree that inability to persuade a libertarian agent is not a limit on the degree of an omnipotent being's power, since such an inability is not due to any lack of power on his part. But the inability to persuade a libertarian agent is definitely a limit on the range of an omnipotent being's power – and a purely logical limit at that. So the truth of counterfactuals of

[51] Leftow, 195n57.

creaturely freedom constitutes no impediment to *S*'s omnipotence in addition to the acceptable broadly logical limits.

Second, Leftow points out that the power to persuade is not guaranteed to produce the desired effect. If someone I am trying to persuade has libertarian freedom, then it is beyond my control whether I succeed. Power to persuade is, again, not an intrinsic power. But if God is omnipotent, he does not depend for his omnipotence on the lucky break of having easily persuadable people around him. Certainly God has intrinsic powers that can be employed in the effort to persuade, but the ability to persuade is not part of what makes him omnipotent.

This second argument makes no advance over the first. The degree of God's power does not depend on having easily persuadable people about, but the range of God's power does. This fact is no infringement upon his omnipotence because it is broadly logically impossible to guarantee that a libertarian agent in freedom-permitting circumstances will be persuaded.

Power to weakly actualize therefore depends upon certain extrinsic circumstances such as the contingent truth of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. But it does not follow, as Leftow believes, that omnipotence is power simply to strongly actualize. Quite the contrary, in fact: suppose that two allegedly omnipotent beings have exactly the same range of power to strongly actualize states of affairs, but one has *in addition* by virtue of his middle knowledge an infinitely greater range of power over states of affairs involving the libertarian free choices of others via weak actualization. We have but to ask whether God would be more powerful in a world in which he can only strongly actualize states of affairs or in a world in which he has that same power plus the power intentionally to weakly actualize states of affairs. As we shall see further when we come to the doctrine of divine providence,[52] a Molinist God is incomprehensibly more powerful than a God who lacks middle knowledge. Therefore power to weakly actualize is definitely relevant to a range account of omnipotence.[53]

Power to weakly actualize is also relevant to the ability to actualize tensed states of affairs, such as Flint and Freddoso envision. Leftow's restriction of omnipotence to the power to strongly actualize leads him to dispense with the requirement that two worlds share the same history at *t* in order to assess someone's omnipotence at *t*. For, he claims, the fixity of the past is another case of extrinsic circumstances imposed upon a

[52] See this *Systematic Philosophical Theology*, vol. III, *De creatione*, pt. II.1: *Providentia ordinaria*.

[53] We see as well the connection between omnipotence and omniscience noted by Charles Taliaferro (see *supra*, 208), for a God endowed with middle knowledge has a vastly wider range of power than a God whose strong actualization of states of affairs results accidentally in the weak actualization of unanticipated states of affairs. Power entails certain cognitive capacities, like middle knowledge.

being's power, which Leftow does not wish to allow. The power to bring it about that, for example, the Germans lost World War II is not intrinsic but depends on one's temporal situation. Thus whether one has this power depends on one's extrinsic circumstances and so is not relevant to one's omnipotence. What matters is simply that the omnipotent being have all the intrinsic powers that would allow it to bring about a German loss were it appropriately situated.

This answer further erodes the plausibility of Leftow's restricting omnipotence to the power to strongly actualize. Flint and Freddoso are talking about the ability to actualize *past-tensed* states of affairs, not tenseless states of affairs like *the Germans' losing World War II*. A person situated before World War II cannot bring about the past-tensed state of affairs that World War II *was lost* but only the relevant future-tensed state of affairs. In order to bring it about that the Germans lost World War II one must be situated after the War, not before it. Just as it is metaphysically impossible to actualize strongly others' libertarian free choices, so it is impossible to actualize strongly past-tensed states of affairs. One must rather have the ability to exploit back-tracking counterfactuals to weakly actualize them. If one lacks that ability, then the range of one's power is clearly diminished.

Leftow's own analysis of the range of an omnipotent agent is as follows:[54]

> At t S's range of action is maximal $=_{\text{def.}}$ at t, $(\forall p)$ ($\diamond$ (something at some time or timelessly causes it to be the case that p and p is not the doing of an action with incompatibilist freedom by someone distinct from S) $\supset$ (S is intrinsically such as to strongly actualize it that p)).

This analysis is fine as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. *Pace* Leftow, the definition is too weak because it fails to ascribe to S the ability to weakly actualize states of affairs which are the doing of actions with incompatibilist freedom by someone distinct from S. Intriguingly, if we do accept Leftow's analysis of the range of God's power, then just as we saw that God is more than omniscient with respect to his cognitive excellence, so also is he more than omnipotent with respect to his power.

9.2.3 Power over Modality

Now Leftow would add a third plank to the analysis of omnipotence, stipulating S's relation to the truthmakers of modal truths. He wants to add that all truthmakers of modal truths are either S himself, or S's being in some

[54] Leftow, "Omnipotence," 190–191; cf. 186.

intrinsic state, or items that *S* brings to be. Although this plank is limned in Leftow's article on omnipotence,[55] it is fully developed in his impressive book *God and Necessity*.[56] The fundamental aim of the book is to meet the ostensible challenge posed by necessary truths to the claim that God is the sole ultimate reality by formulating and defending a theistic metaphysics for grounding modal truths. So the basic question which the book seeks to answer is how modal truths relate to God. A subsidiary aim is to address the challenge posed by abstract objects to divine ultimacy.

Leftow believes that an ostensible conflict with classical theism's claim of divine ultimacy arises from the assumptions[57] that

9. Some strongly necessary truths are not about God and are not negative existentials, e.g., mathematical truths.
10. It is always the case that if a truth is necessary and not a negative existential, it has an ontology.
11. If a necessary truth not about God has an ontology, all of it lies outside God.

The conjunction of (9)–(11) implies that there exists something ontologically outside God which supplies the ontology for mathematical truths. But Leftow thinks it difficult to see how such *abstracta* could be created by God, which contradicts God's being the sole ultimate reality.

Leftow identifies four possible ways to deal with this apparent conflict:

(i) Deny that modal truths have an ontology.
(ii) Restrict the scope of God's ultimacy to exempt various *abstracta*.
(iii) Adopt a "safe" ontology that does not conflict with divine ultimacy.
(iv) Make God the ontological foundation of modality.

Although Leftow very briefly discusses (i–iii), he concedes that his discussion does not suffice to dispose of these options conclusively. Still, he thinks that he has given "at least some reason to think that these will not do."[58] The bulk of the book is then taken up by an examination of the competing theistic views comprised by (iv). Leftow would solve the problem posed by logical limits to omnipotence by maintaining, "It is not the possible that places limits on God, but God who delimits the possible."[59]

[55] Leftow, 187–190.
[56] Brian Leftow, *God and Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
[57] I retain Leftow's numbering.
[58] Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 71.
[59] Leftow, "Omnipotence," 189.

Theistic views of type (iv) are united in their conviction, which Leftow thinks theists ought to endorse, that for any true modal proposition *p* God either is, contains, has, has attributes that have, or produces all truthmakers or truth-explainers for ◊*p* or □p.[60] Theistic theories may be differentiated on the basis of which facet of theism they call upon to explain modal truths. An important class of theistic theories, indeed, the dominant position, is what Leftow calls "deity theories," those which ground modality in God's nature. Thomism is a prime example of such a theory. Not only does Leftow find no good reason to embrace a deity theory, but he also subjects them to particularly heavy criticism.[61]

Other theistic theories, often going under the label *theistic activism*, appeal to God's activity instead of, or in addition to, God's nature, to ground modal truths, either his contingent activity (Cartesianism), or his necessary activity, as either determined by his nature (Leibnizianism) or not so determined (Leftow's own view).[62] Leftow considers Descartes' Platonism uneconomical, since it assumes a realm of dependently existing *abstracta*,[63] and incoherent, since it cannot be up to any being what its own nature is.[64] He considers Leibniz's natural act theory to be a needlessly elaborated deity theory, since on this view God's nature determines his activity.[65]

On Leftow's own view necessary truths solely about God, like necessary truths of logic and mathematics, have their foundation in God's nature. Where he departs from deity theories is his handling of so-called secular modal truths, truths which are solely about the world and so provide no information about God.[66] Leftow develops an ingenious account of how God is responsible for stipulating modal truths about creatures.

On a deity theory like Aquinas', the divine nature includes powers to do various things, such as to create a dog, and therefore it is possible that dogs exist. Leftow says that we may move away from such a deity theory in two steps: (1) First, while agreeing that it belongs to God's nature to conceive secular states of affairs, hold that it is at God's discretion to assign to them their modal status. So God by his nature conceives of things like zebras, married bachelors, round squares, and unicorns, and he freely decides which of these will be possible or not. (2) Then deny that it does belong to God's nature to conceive all the various secular states of affairs

[60] Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 115.
[61] Leftow, chaps. 6, 8.
[62] Leftow, 136.
[63] Leftow, 74.
[64] Leftow, 134.
[65] Leftow, 144.
[66] Leftow, 249.

and thus restrict God's natural powers to general abilities to conceive, create, and so on, in the place of determinate powers like the ability to create a dog. It is up to God to invent or "dream up" the various secular states of affairs before assigning their modal status to them. Thus, Leftow's view, like Cartesianism, has a strong voluntaristic component: God freely thinks up secular states of affairs and then freely decides which of them are to be possible or not.

Leftow's view leads to a bizarre modal theory. One might think that on his view God could have decided to dream up other states of affairs or could have assigned to them a modal status different from that which they have. But such modal locutions cannot be true until God has determined what is and is not possible. Modality on Leftow's view arises only *ex post facto*, so that, given God's decision, it is now impossible that God could have dreamed up different states of affairs or made round squares possible.[67] There is no possible world in which God thinks up different secular states of affairs or assigns a different modal status to them. Nevertheless, it is up to God both what secular states of affairs there are and which possible worlds there are.

Leftow struggles to find a coherent articulation of his view. "If either the stock of states of affairs or their modal status is up to God, one needs to say something *like* that God has the power to bring about states of affairs that are not in fact possible, without actually saying it and so suggesting that they are after all possible."[68] Leftow proposes the locution that it was "in God" to think up different states of affairs and assign a different modal status to those he has invented.[69] This notion he defines as follows:

> God has it in Him to do A $=_{\text{def.}}$ God is intrinsically such that (God wills to have the power to do A) $\supset$ (God has the power to do A).

Is the material conditional in the *definiens* intended to have as its antecedent the entire preceding clause or simply the parenthetical clause? Since on Leftow's theory God does not will to have the power to do A by his nature,[70] the *definiens* must have the form: God is intrinsically such

[67] "God could not have thought up other than He did. . . . I only add that this modal character was not imposed by His nature, but instead was consequent on His thinking as He did. Whereas Platonists, and so on, will say that God thought as He did because He had to, I say that He had to only because He did" (Leftow, 496).
[68] Leftow, 253.
[69] Leftow, 252.
[70] Leftow says, "It is in God to make dogs, but it is not by His nature in Him to make dogs, since it is not part of his nature that there should be such a property as doghood" (Leftow, 253).

that: $(p \supset q)$.[71] In other words, on Leftow's view it belongs to God's nature to bestow powers on himself. God does not naturally have the power to create a dog, but he has willed to have that power. In that explanatorily prior moment, it is in God to create a dog, but he does not have the power to create a dog. Similarly, it is in him to conceive different states of affairs, but he does not have the power to conceive different states of affairs.

Explanatorily prior to God's conceiving creatures, there are no modal facts about particular creaturely states of affairs at all. Nonetheless, because God has the general power to create creatures, it follows that God's nature guarantees that possibly creatures exist. Since it is a secular modal truth that possibly creatures exist, Leftow concedes that his view is a very thin, partial deity theory.[72] God's nature alone suffices to make it true that possibly there is something non-divine. In order for particular non-divine things to exist, however, God must first think them up and then decide which of them shall be possible.

On Leftow's view God's assignment of modal status to the things he thinks up is guided by his preferences. Apart from preferences concerning moral or perhaps aesthetic value, God's preferences are not determined by his nature but are brute. In line with his preferences God decides that some things should be possible and others impossible. The former, Leftow (somewhat misleadingly) says, God permits and the others prevents. Leftow provides a nice summary of the explanatory order in the genesis of secular modality:[73]

(i) God exists wholly alone. There are no other *concreta*. There is nothing abstract outside him. God has the power to create, and so it is possible that there be some creature or other, but there are no states of affairs involving determinant creatures.

(ii) God thinks up states of affairs involving determinate creatures.

(iii) God notes any good- or bad-making features these states would have, were they to obtain.

(iv) If the states would have good- or bad-making features, God takes attitudes toward (has preferences concerning) their obtaining. If they would not have such features, God takes no attitude toward their obtaining.

(v) Given his approval, disapproval, or neutrality, God decides whether to permit or prevent the various states of affairs.

(vi) God prevents or permits the various secular states of affairs, thereby determining their modal status.

[71] This becomes clearer on page 296 of Leftow, *God and Necessity*.
[72] Leftow, 275.
[73] Leftow, 362–364.

Finally, Leftow provides a reductive analysis of broadly logical modality in terms of causal modality. Modalities are determined by powers plus the opportunity to employ them. So something is broadly logically possible if it is causally possible for God to produce; if God lacks the causal power to bring it about, then it is impossible.[74] It is important to keep in mind, of course, that on Leftow's view God himself freely decides which causal powers he has concerning specific secular states of affairs. They are the result of his permissions and preventions.

What shall we say to all this? To begin with, I think it is clear that Leftow's modal theory, while impressive, is highly counterintuitive. For intuitively, if it is up to God in that explanatorily prior moment freely to invent determinate secular states of affairs and creaturely essences and freely to assign to them their modal status, then God was able to do so, had the power to do so, and could do so. Not only that, but he also was able to invent and decide differently, had the power to do so, and could have done so. This is just how these modal locutions are used. But on Leftow's theory all that is false. God lacked the power to conceive of a dog and so also the power to make dogs possible. And on Leftow's strange retrospective modality, it is impossible that God have done anything differently. Flouting our strong modal intuitions, Leftow's theory is therefore highly counterintuitive.

Moreover, his theory may well be incoherent. On Leftow's view it is "in God" to think up different secular states of affairs or creaturely essences. This locution sounds like a modal notion, to the effect that God was able to do such things. Leftow himself uses the locution in this way. But Leftow denies that it is a modal notion.[75] Being in God is defined to mean that God's nature is such that a certain material conditional is true: if God wills to have a particular power, such as to create dogs, then he has it. Leftow's conditional definition of what it is to be "in God" is equivalent to saying that God wills to have a particular power only if he has it. That seems to get the explanatory priority wrong, which suggests that material implication is too weak to serve the intended purpose here. The intention seems to be to make God's willing to have a particular power explanatorily prior to his having it: he has it because he willed it; he does not will it because he has it. This, however, raises the further question: can he, explanatorily prior to thinking up secular states of affairs, will to have the power to create dogs? The answer is no, for in that explanatorily prior moment, according to Leftow's account, there is no such thing as doghood. Therefore, God at that moment is unable to will to have the power to create dogs. But if he is

[74] Leftow, 391.
[75] Leftow, 253.

unable to will to have the power to create dogs, how does God manage to acquire that power?

One might answer that it is in God to will to have the power to create dogs. But if that is not a modal notion, then same problem recurs: God is unable to will to have the power to will to have the power to create dogs, since there is not yet any such thing as doghood. We are evidently embarked on an infinite regress that is truly vicious, since at every stage God is powerless to will what is required. So being "in God" either is a modal notion, in which case God does have particular powers after all, *per* typical deity theories, or else it involves a vicious infinite regress, subverting a successful account of God's powers.

Moreover, consider God's assigning modal status to the secular states of affairs he conceives. According to Leftow's account, God's assignments were guided by his preferences, and he could have had different preferences. *Nota bene* that having different preferences was not merely in God; according to Leftow's account God was able, that is, had the power, to have different preferences.[76] So why is it not possible that God's preferences were such that dogs, say, turned out to be reptiles rather than mammals?[77] Is it not thus possible, contrary to Leftow's theory, that dogs be reptiles?

Leftow denies this, maintaining that God, whatever his preferences, must have the same permissions and preventions that he does in the actual world.[78] Leftow is keenly aware of the difficulty this affirmation presents:

> This may seem to sit uneasily with His being able to have alternate preferences, as it implies that no matter what God had preferred, though He might have chosen a different actuality – shaping the universe's ends in different ways, creating a different universe, or not creating – He would not have allowed different possibilities. But this is at worst only a tension, not an inconsistency, and perhaps the tension is only apparent.[79]

This response seems to underestimate the difficulty. Even were it true that if God had different preferences, he *would* choose the same possibilities

[76] "God has the chance and power to adopt other preferences. His doing so is causally possible. So there are alternate, causally possible states for reality, in which He has these preferences *ab initio*" (Leftow, 403).
[77] Leftow endorses divine conventionalism with respect to non-definitional, modal-essential truths (Leftow, 432). On Leftow's view it is in God to invent creaturely essences that include the properties of dogs and reptiles or the properties of dogs and mammals. Suppose that he has done so. He has preferred that the former be impossible and the latter possible. But he could have preferred otherwise. Leftow's view leaves it undecided whether, had he done so, creatures exemplifying that essence would be reptilian dogs or would be some other sort of creature, "schmogs," which replace dogs. In either case, the salient point is that God was able to create something that is impossible.
[78] Leftow, 406.
[79] Leftow, 407.

(itself a highly dubious assumption!), nevertheless, God, as a libertarian agent, still *could* choose differently. So there seems to be a genuine inconsistency here.[80]

As for the tension, Leftow tries to reduce it by emphasizing that God's moral nature constrains his preferences and thus his assignment of modal status. But we have already seen how general those preferences are and that with regard to many states of affairs God is indifferent as to their modal status. It seems perfectly consistent with God's nature that he have decided that gold have a different atomic number or that dogs be reptiles. Indeed, if we allow God's preferences to constrain his choices too narrowly, then Leftow's theory is in danger of collapsing into a deity theory.

In light of the above, we should do well at this point to re-examine Leftow's motivation for adopting so extraordinary a modal theory in the first place. Here Leftow's subsidiary project of crafting an anti-Platonist metaphysic becomes crucial. He says that his ultimacy concerns are met if God is the sole, beginningless, ultimate reality, there is a level of causal explanation at which God alone explains other things' existence, there is no going past this level in any explanation of other things' existence, nothing other than God accounts for God's existence, and everything other than God has/had a cause of its existence.[81] It seems that it is not necessary truth as such which threatens divine ultimacy after all. Rather Platonism is the *bête noire*.

It is striking, however, how independent Leftow's modal theory is of his anti-Platonist metaphysic. Leftow's strategy for dealing with Platonism is to dispense with *abstracta* nominalistically insofar as is possible and then to find truthmakers for abstract discourse in mental events in the mind of God. Leftow recognizes that the theist who shares Leftow's ultimacy concerns may adopt such a metaphysic without embracing Leftow's modal

[80] On Leftow's view all possible histories form a treelike structure beginning at the moment at which God thinks up secular states of affairs (Leftow, 403–406). God's forming his actual preferences begins one branch. There are other possible histories branching from that moment in which God has different preferences. As each possible history continues from its preferential starting point, it branches into a tree of causally possible continuations. A path through such a tree is a possible world. Leftow holds that to occur on a branch continuing from a branch of actual history is to be possibly possible. But now consider histories continuing from different initial preferential starting points. Since it is causally possible for God to have such preferences, paths through such branches ought to be regarded as possibly possible and therefore, by S5, possible.

Leftow rejoins that since God could not have dreamed up different secular states of affairs than he has, "God must have all and only the actual candidate histories in view" (Leftow, 407). This rejoinder seems incorrect. Take a physically possible universe operating according to different natural laws. God could have preferred that such a world be impossible, in which case it is not one of the actual candidate histories. Of course, given that all branches originate in the moment of God's thinking up secular states of affairs, they *are* branches off the actual world and so on Leftow's own view possible, in contradiction to his theory.

[81] Leftow, 133.

theory.[82] Once one has adopted his divine psychologism, one need not offer any modal theory at all, for the ultimacy concerns have been satisfied. Ironically, then, the central project of Leftow's book is thus seen to be something of a red herring or addendum to the really important matter, which is defeating Platonism, a concern I share and have already addressed.[83]

I therefore see no need to turn to theistic activism to supplement our account of omnipotence.

9.3 Concluding Remarks

So putting together the two parts of the analysis, we have as our account of omnipotence:

> Degree: *S* is omnipotent at *t* if and only if it is not the case at *t* that there is some state of affairs *s* that *S* is unable to bring about at least partially because of a lack of power in *S*.
>
> Range: *S* is omnipotent at *t* if and only if (*S* has the power at *t* to actualize *s* if there is some world having both the same history at *t* and the same world-type-for-*S* as the actual world in which someone actualizes *s* at *t*).

S is omnipotent *simpliciter* if and only if *S* satisfies both the degree and range conditions. Since omnipotence so defined is a coherent property which is clearly great-making, perfect being theology warrants characterizing the almighty God of the Bible as omnipotent.[84]

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[82] Leftow, 97.

[83] See *supra*, chap. 4 "Aseity." I take up Leftow's formulation and defense of divine psychologism in my review of *God and Necessity*, by Brian Leftow, *Philosophy* 89, no. 347 (2014): 171–176. But it is worth noting how attenuated Leftow's discussion of anti-Platonism is. Leftow's psychologism is a realist version of anti-Platonism. He takes little cognizance of anti-realist views. This omission is not explicitly acknowledged until the final paragraph of the book: "theism yields the best realist account of modality. The anti-realist options include conventionalism, fictionalism, and projectivism. . . . My full treatment of modal anti-realism must await another occasion" (Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 551). Leftow refers to conventionalism and fictionalism as versions of the "no ontology" view (540). That should prompt us to re-visit Leftow's brief discussion of the first way to deal with the alleged conflict between theism and necessary truth: the no ontology solution (48–59). He rejects this solution because necessary truths, even if they have no truthmakers, involve an ontological commitment to the truths themselves. But a deflationary account of truth would avoid such a commitment, taking the truth predicate to be merely a device of semantic ascent, a way of talking about a proposition *p* rather than asserting that *p*. See this *Systematic Philosophical Theology,* vol. I, Prolegomena, 63–64.

[84] I am grateful to Thomas Flint, Alfred Freddoso, and Daniel Hill for discussion of issues raised in this section.

10
Goodness

Believers in the monotheistic tradition have always held that God is perfectly good, and Christian theologians have thought of God as the fount of all varieties of goodness, whether moral, metaphysical, aesthetic, or any other. Here our primary interest is in God's moral goodness. Up to this point we have been engaged in a discussion of what has traditionally been called the non-moral attributes of God. But obviously God, as a being worthy of worship, possesses moral attributes as well. A being that is very good but morally imperfect might be worthy of admiration or respect, but only a being that is morally perfect could be worthy of worship.[1] Indeed, perfect being theology entails by definition that God is morally perfect, since to be morally imperfect or morally flawed is inconsistent with perfection. Hence, God must be perfectly good.

Three questions arise in connection with God's perfect goodness: (1) What is the content of God's perfect goodness? (2) What is the relationship between God and the good/right? And (3) is divine moral perfection compatible with divine freedom? Before turning to an examination of these questions, let us survey the biblical data pertinent to divine goodness.

[1] Laura Garcia reports that most theists would therefore sooner give up omnipotence or omniscience than God's moral perfection, which is taken to be the attribute most essential to God (Laura Garcia, "Moral Perfection," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], 218).

Systematic Philosophical Theology: On God: Attributes of God, Volume IIa, First Edition.
William Lane Craig.
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10.1 Biblical Data Concerning Divine Goodness

In addition to goodness, the Bible ascribes to God a wealth of moral properties, including holiness, righteousness, love, grace, mercy, long-suffering, loving kindness, faithfulness, and so on.[2] We might think that the goodness of God is a general moral property designating God's moral perfection and comprising his righteousness, love, grace, mercy, long-suffering, and so on,[3] but biblically speaking this would be, in fact, incorrect. Rather, as Feinberg explains, the Hebrew words for goodness *ṭôb* /*ṭûb* have, like the English word, a breadth of meanings: (1) practical, economic, or material blessing, (2) abstract properties such as desirability, pleasantness, and beauty, (3) quality or expense, (4) moral goodness, and (5) *eudaimonia* (the "good life").[4] When the biblical authors speak of God's goodness, what they typically have in mind is not God's moral goodness but God's beneficence or generosity. Thus the Psalms are filled with grateful praises for the goodness of the Lord (Ps 34.8a; 100. 5; 106.1; 107.1; 118.1, 29; 135.3; 145.7, 9; cf. I Chron 16.34; II Chron 5.13; 7.3). Feinberg concludes, "When we look at the biblical concept of divine goodness, one major idea stands out. It is that God is concerned about the well-being of his creatures and does things to promote it. Of course, God is interested in doing what is morally good and right, but biblical writers capture that idea by referring to his *righteousness* and *holiness*."[5] Since our interest is in God's moral goodness, we are therefore better advised to look more closely at the biblical data concerning God's righteousness, rather than his goodness.

The Hebrew word *ṣedeq* (righteousness) and the Greek expression *dikaiosynē theou* (the righteousness of God) are Janus-faced terms used to denote, among other things, God's moral character.[6] That is to say, God's

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[2] The biblical data are meticulously surveyed by John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), chap. 8.

[3] Herman Bavinck, while acknowledging that the Scriptures rarely call God good in this "absolute sense," nevertheless thinks that God's goodness is manifested as these other properties (*Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols., trans. John Vriend, ed. John Bolt [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003], 2:213–214, 223–224), thereby making goodness more fundamental.

[4] Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 366.

[5] Feinberg, 366 (my emphasis). Hoffman and Rosenkrantz overlook the important distinction between God's benevolence and God's righteousness (or moral perfection) when they write, "God is omnibenevolent, or perfectly good. It is this attribute of God that justifies the worship and love of God on the part of believers" (Joshua Hoffman and Gary S. Rosenkrantz, "Omnibenevolence," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021).

[6] Classically, there has been a debate among Protestant theologians whether the expression *dikaiosynē theou* refers to an attribute of God himself or to the righteousness which he reckons to believers. Lutheran theologians were especially insistent on the latter understanding. This is a righteousness which is given to us, not a property inhering in God himself. It is clear, I think, that biblically the expression *dikaiosynē theou* is multivalent.

righteousness in Scripture looks in two directions, as it were, covering both God's love and his justice.[7] Feinberg observes that there is a wealth of biblical material concerning the righteousness of God. Words deriving from the root *ṣedeq* occur 523 times in the OT. The nominal forms fall mainly into three groups: legal righteousness (123 times), ethical righteousness (114 times), and correctness (26 times). The NT has 92 examples of the noun *dikaiosynē*, 39 of the verb *dikaioō* (to justify or reckon righteous), 81 of the adjective *dikaios* (just or righteous), ten of the noun *dikaiōma* (ordinance or sentence of justification), and five of the adverb *dikaiōs* (justly or righteously).[8]

Recently, a debate about the expression *dikaiosynē theou* has arisen as a result of the so-called "new perspective on Paul," some proponents of which construe God's righteousness to be his covenant faithfulness. This construal is not itself new but goes back to German theologians like Hermann Cremer in the late nineteenth century.[9] Cremer believed that the righteousness of God is not a normative concept but rather a relational concept involving persons. He claimed, moreover, that God's righteousness has only to do with God's saving activity. Cremer did not deny that God's salvation of the righteous entails his punishment of the wicked, but he insisted that God's righteousness finds expression only in his saving action. Proponents of the new perspective have followed Cremer in thinking God's righteousness to be a relational, not a normative, concept and have identified it with God's being faithful to his covenant people.

The claim here seems to be implausible on the face of it, for it amounts to nothing less than the claim that teams of English translators, not to mention non-English translators, have for generations actually mistranslated the expression *dikaiosynē theou,* since the English word "righteousness"

"The righteousness of God through faith" (Rom 3.22) clearly refers to reckoned righteousness, since God's attribute is not "through faith," nor is it "for all who believe." God's inherent righteousness, like his power or wisdom, is an essential property of God which he has objectively and independently of whether any human beings at all exist, much less have faith in him. So the righteousness referred to in v. 22 is a righteousness from God which believers possess. But then just as clearly, "he himself is righteous" (Rom 3.26) designates a property that God himself has. Here we do have reference to a property possessed not by believers but by God, akin to his wisdom or power. At least three times in the Pauline corpus, Paul uses *dikaiosynē theou* to refer to God's inherent righteousness (Rom 3.5, 25–26).

[7] Bavinck provides a clear discussion of both of these aspects of divine righteousness (Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:221–24). While "God's righteousness is most often conceived in a favorable sense and described as the attribute by virtue of which God vindicates the righteous and raises them to a position of honor and well-being," nonetheless "the punishment of the wicked is often ascribed to God's righteousness" (222–223).

[8] Leon Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1983), 181.

[9] See brief background in Mark A. Seifrid, "Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*: *A Fresh Appraisal of Paul and Second Temple Judaism*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, vol. 1: *The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, WUNT 2/140 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 417–419.

just does not mean *faithfulness*.[10] Proponents of the new perspective would have us believe that the meaning of NT Greek *dik-* words, under the influence of the LXX, has been fundamentally changed so as to introduce covenantal ideas not present in extra-biblical Greek. The Hebrew word *ṣedeq* (also, in effect, mistranslated by "righteousness") is also said not to express a normative concept like *moral goodness* but rather a relational concept like *faithful to*.

The implausibility of the new perspective's reductionism is perhaps best seen by asking what the opposite of righteousness, that is, unrighteousness, is said by Paul to be.[11] It is not unfaithfulness, but wickedness and ungodliness (Rom 1.18) or lawlessness (II Cor 6.14). Faithlessness is but one of the litany of sins listed by Paul which results in God's just condemnation (Rom 1.29–31; 2.2). Righteousness is a broad moral property which entails faithfulness, since to break one's word is wrong, but is not reducible to it. As Mark Seifrid puts it, "All 'covenant-keeping' is righteous behavior, but not all righteous behavior is 'covenant-keeping.' It is misleading, therefore, to speak of 'God's righteousness' as his 'covenant-faithfulness.'"[12] Seifrid points out that righteousness language in the OT has primarily to do with God's role as Judge and Ruler of creation. As such it is normative, having to do with God's establishing right moral order in the world. It takes on a positive or salvific sense because the biblical writers expect God to intervene to reinstate right order when it is usurped by evil in the world. It takes on a negative or punitive sense because the biblical writers expect reinstatement of right order to involve the punishment of the wicked. As Seifrid so aptly puts it, "Retribution remains on the

[10] See Carson's incredulity that anyone should think that the *dik-* words have nothing to do with justice or righteousness (D. A. Carson, "The Vindication of Imputation: On Fields of Discourse and Semantic Fields," in *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004], 51). Henri Blocher draws attention to the combination of such words in II Thess 1.5–9: "Apart from 2 Timothy 4:8 (recompense awarded by the Righteous Judge), 2 Thessalonians 1: 5–9 is most remarkable: the unfolding of God's 'righteous judgment' (v. 5, *dikaias kriseōs*) implies that it is 'just' (v. 6, *dikaion*) for God to requite (*antapodounai*) persecutors, thereby achieving 'vengeance' or satisfaction of justice (v. 8, *ekdikēsin*) in flaming fire, the punishment (v. 9, *dikēn*) of everlasting ruin" (Henri Blocher, "Justification of the Ungodly (*Sola Fide*): Theological Reflections," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, Mark A. Seifrid, vol. 2: *The Paradoxes of Paul*, WUNT 2/181 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004], 475).

[11] In any case, the reductionistic interpretation of *dikaiosynē theou* as covenant faithfulness has been shown to be lexicographically untenable. Charles Lee Irons' *The Righteousness of God: A Lexical Examination of the Covenant-Faithfulness Interpretation*, WUNT 2/386 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), is the definitive work on this expression and a convincing refutation of the reductionistic interpretation of the new perspective. According to Irons, in the OT "Righteousness is a *Normbegriff* [normative concept], and the norm is God's own moral law, which is grounded in his unchanging nature as a God of perfect holiness, justice, and truth" (340).

[12] Seifrid, "Righteousness Language," 424.

'backside' of divine acts of righteousness."[13] So while there are 64 instances of God's saving righteousness in the OT, Seifrid counts as well 15 cases in which God's righteousness is conceived in retributive or punitive terms (Ex 9.27; Ps 7.10; 7.12; 11.5–7; 50.6; Is 1.27; 5.15–16; 10.22; 28.17; Lam 1.18; II Chron 12.1–6; Neh 9.33; Dan 9.7; 9.14; 9.16). God's righteousness comprises both aspects.[14]

Fortunately, proponents of the new perspective have backed away from the overly simplistic conception of God's righteousness. For example, J. D. G. Dunn, in response to his critics, acknowledges that the Hebrew concept of righteousness cannot be reduced to covenant faithfulness or salvation. Righteousness language in the Hebrew Scriptures also involves punitive divine justice, according to which righteousness is "understood as measured by a norm, right order, or that which is morally right," with the qualification that "the norm is not seen as some abstract ideal. . . , but rather as a norm concretised in relation" between God and creatures.[15] So when we come to Romans, "That God's righteousness towards the peoples he has created includes wrath and judgment as well as faithfulness and salvation is clearly implicit in the sequences Rom. 1.16–18 and 3.3–6."[16]

The righteousness of God therefore seems to be the relevant biblical concept for God's moral perfection and comprises both his love and justice. The Scriptures famously assert that "God is love" (I Jn 4.8) and even ascribe relationships of love to the eternal Trinitarian persons (Jn 3.35; 14.31; 17.22–26). At the same time the Scriptures are replete with references to God's hatred of sin, jealousy, wrath, and vengeance, which are manifestations of his justice.[17]

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[13] Mark A. Seifrid, "Paul's Use of Righteousness Language against Its Hellenistic Background," in Carson, O'Brien, and Seifrid, *Paradoxes of Paul*, 44. Or, more accurately, "of God's saving acts of righteousness."

[14] According to Irons both vindication and punishment are expressions of divine righteousness. Proponents of the new perspective have focused solely on the positive role of God's righteousness in vindicating and saving his people, when in fact the flip side of that vindication is the punishment of the wicked who are oppressing God's people and opposing God. Irons counts 41 examples in the OT and 35 in the Dead Sea scrolls where God's righteousness is used in the sense of God's judicial activity that results in the punishment of Israel's enemies, thereby delivering and vindicating his people (Irons, *Righteousness of God,* 296).

[15] James D. G. Dunn, "The New Perspective: Whence, What and Whither?" in *The New Perspective on Paul*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 63–64. Cf. Seifrid's comment: "Biblical usage of righteousness language is distinct from Greek thought *not* in the lack of the idea of a norm, but in that it does not *define* the norm it presupposes in terms of the *idea* of the good. . . . The Hebrew Scriptures operate with the simple but profound assumption that 'righteousness' in its various expressions is ultimately bound up with God and his working" (Seifrid, "Hellenistic Background," 43–44).

[16] Dunn, "New Perspective," 64–65.

[17] See Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:223 for many examples.

10.2 The Content of God's Moral Character

10.2.1 The Identity Thesis

A number of contemporary philosophical theologians have sought to reduce the content of God's moral character to his agape love. Jordan Wessling has dubbed this claim the Identity Thesis. The thesis is that "God's love is identical to His moral goodness," such that "God possesses no moral attribute that is not essentially and most fundamentally a matter of love."[18] This superficially appealing thesis seems to be the lingering vestige of classical liberal theology, which eschewed the justice and wrath of God in favor of his love. Despite the eclipse of classical liberal theology in the early twentieth century, it has become almost an axiom among contemporary theologians that God does not need to be reconciled to sinners; the entire obstacle lies on our side. Because the NT authors use *katalassō* (reconcile) and its cognates only with respect to human beings, not God, it is said that we may infer that God does not need to be reconciled to humanity, but only humanity to a welcoming God. Our hearts need to be changed so that our hostility to God evaporates and we embrace his love. Such an argument from silence overlooks the abundant scriptural testimony to God's justice and wrath, which may demand satisfaction and propitiation.[19] Neo-liberal theology, if we may coin a term, affirms God's wrath but sees it wholly as a manifestation of his love aimed at the reformation of sinners.

Wessling adduces two lines of NT evidence in support of the Identity Thesis. First, Jesus as well as various NT authors teach that love fulfills the law. Second, Jesus as well as certain biblical authors ground this completed human ethic of love in God's nature. These considerations do not, however, bear the theological freight that Wessling would lay upon them. The appeal to Jesus' aphorism about love's fulfilling the law's positive demands overlooks what those who break the law are thought and said to deserve,

[18] Jordan Wessling, "Divine Goodness and Love," in *T & T Clark Handbook of Analytic Theology*, ed. James M. Arcadi and James T. Turner (London: T & T Clark, 2021), 148. A sufficient condition of this thesis is said to be that "a complete understanding of God's love, plus a complete description of the relevant circumstances (excluding additional moral premises), would in principle enable one to determine each actual or possible item of behavior (including behaviors of thought and character) that God would judge that He should do, is acceptable to do, or should not do."

[19] For an extended discussion see my *Atonement and the Death of Christ: An Exegetical, Historical, and Philosophical Exploration* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020), chap. 4. In Rom 1.18–3.20 Paul describes the human predicament as a result of the universality of sin and our consequent condemnation before a just God. Not one of us, as lawbreakers, will be acquitted before the bar of God's justice; the verdict of "guilty" is pronounced over every human being. Jew and Gentile alike are said to stand under the wrath of God. Any adequate interpretation of the succeeding passage Rom 3.21–26 must find therein Paul's solution to the problem of man's condemnation before a just Judge and the attendant dissolution of divine wrath.

which is punitive justice. That the law reflects God's loving character most certainly does not imply that God's righteousness does not comprise justice as well as love or that his justice is reducible to his love.

10.2.2 Divine Justice

We have seen that, biblically speaking, justice as well as love belongs to God's righteousness. But what sort of justice is this? Theories of punitive justice may be broadly classified as either *retributive* or *consequentialist*. Retributive theories of justice hold that punishment is justified because the guilty deserve to be punished. Consequentialist theories of justice hold that punishment is justified because of the extrinsic goods that may be realized thereby, such as deterrence of crime, sequestration of dangerous persons, and reformation of wrongdoers. Retributive theories are often said to be retrospective, imposing punishment for crimes committed, whereas consequentialist theories are prospective, aiming to prevent crimes from being committed.

Retributivism may be further distinguished as either positive or negative. While negative retributivism holds that the innocent should not be punished because they do not deserve it, the essence of retributive justice lies in positive retributivism, which holds that the guilty should be punished because they deserve it. What distinguishes retributivism as a theory of justice is the positive thesis that punishment of the guilty is an intrinsic good because the guilty deserve it. The intrinsic goodness of punishment of the guilty does not preclude that there are also extrinsic goods that might be achieved by giving people their just desert. But what ultimately justifies punishment is that it is the just desert of the guilty.

10.2.2.1 God's Retributive Justice

In the Bible God is described as a positive retributivist "who will by no means clear the guilty" (Ex 34.7). In the biblical view, the wicked deserve punishment (Rom 1.32; Heb 10.29), and the Bible ascribes to God retribution (Heb. *gĕmûl* [Is 59.18]; *nĕqāmâ* [Jer 50.15; 51.6]; Grk. *ekdikēsis* [Rom 11.9]; *avtapodoma* [Rom 12.19]) for sins, so that God's justice must be in some significant measure retributive.[20] The God of the Bible is not just a

[20] On the Hebrew words and their significance, see K. Seybold, "גְּמֻל," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament,* vol. 3, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and David E. Green (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1978), sec. II.2.c, "In Statements Concerning Divine Judgment"; also E. Lipiński, "נָקָם," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 10:1–9. When used by the prophets in connection with certain verbs like *šālam* (to repay), *gemûl* has the sense of "payment, reward, recompense, or revenge." According to Seybold, Psalms of individual lament

benevolent father figure but, as Hugo Grotius emphasized in his critique of Faustus Socinus, he is the impartial Ruler and Judge of the creation, responsible for maintaining its moral order.[21]

Indeed, it is plausible, I think, that retributive justice belongs essentially to God. We have already said that the more central and prominent an attribute is in the biblical picture of God, the stronger the case for taking it to be an essential attribute of God, rather than accidental to him.[22] It is hard to think of an attribute more central and prominent in the biblical picture of God than his righteousness, which comprises his justice. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen 18.25). "Is there injustice (*adikia*) on God's part? By no means!" (Rom 9.14). It would have been inconceivable to the biblical authors that God might act unjustly.

10.2.2.2 Denial of Divine Retributive Justice

Kevin Kinghorn, like Socinus, disputes that retributive justice belongs to God's essence. For God, existing alone sans creation, would not exhibit retributive justice in intra-Trinitarian relationships: "because the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit could never wrong one another, retributive justice would never be operative."[23] But this objection is misconceived. God can have the property of giving every person his due without the existence of created persons. Moreover, God sans creation exhibits negative retributive justice among the persons of the Trinity in that he does not punish the innocent. Kinghorn is right that sans creation God is not wrathful, just as he is not wrathful in possible worlds in which created persons never sin, so that wrath is not an essential property of God.[24] But God, though wrathless, is in such circumstances still essentially righteous and perfectly just.

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like Ps 28.4; Lam 3.64, in "complete harmony" with the prophetic oracles like Is 59.18, offer prayers for *gemûl* as "a judicial and retributive intervention of Yahweh." The verbal root *nqm* expresses the notion of revenge, in Yahweh's case in accord with retributive justice, the *lex talionis*. Similarly, "We speak today of 'getting one's just reward,' meaning that one is getting due punishment" (Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52*, Anchor Bible 21C [New York: Doubleday, 2004], 439). The Greek words are not only abundantly used in the LXX to translate the relevant Hebrew terms but are used in the NT to indicate, among other things, divine retribution and vengeance (*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 2nd ed., ed. Moisés Silva, vol. 1, s.v. "δίδωμι ," and "δίκη ," [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014]).

[21] Hugo Grotius, *A Defence of the Catholic Faith concerning the Satisfaction of Christ, against Faustus Socinus*, II.

[22] See *supra*, 114.

[23] Kevin Kinghorn with Stephen Travis, *But What about God's Wrath? The Compelling Love Story of Divine Anger* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 30. He concludes, "God's attribute of justice is not essential to God's nature in the way that his attribute of love is essential. God's justice is only needed in the world (such as ours) where there are imperfections and shortages. God's essential nature is therefore not just" (35).

[24] Kinghorn generally tends to conflate divine wrath and justice. He is correct in thinking that comparing God's love and God's wrath "is . . . in a sense like comparing apples to oranges" (Kinghorn, 35). But the relevant comparison is not between God's love and God's wrath but between God's love and God's justice, both of which are comprised by his righteousness.

In any case, in relation to created persons the God of the Bible exhibits retributive justice. Wessling notwithstanding, there is no *prima facie* incompatibility between God's valuing the flourishing of people and valuing friendship with them, even though he sentences them to their just desert with no expectation of reform. Retributivism is perfectly compatible with God's ongoing love for those he punishes, even the damned in hell, just as it is possible for a judge personally to love and forgive someone brought before his bar, even as he declares him guilty and sentences him to severe punishment. God can personally will the good of sinners and desire their union with him without waiving the demands of retributive justice. In short, God's giving the guilty their just desert does not preclude his loving them.

During the first half of the twentieth century, under the influence of psychologists and social scientists, retributive theories of justice were frowned upon in favor of consequentialist theories. Fortunately, there has been over the past half century or so a renaissance of theories of retributive justice, accompanied by a fading of consequentialist theories,[25] so that the Christian theologian working within the mainstream position need not be diverted by justifying a retributive theory of justice.

10.2.2.3 Affirmation of Divine Consequentialism

10.2.2.3.1 Rejection of Divine Retributivism for Divine Consequentialism

It is striking that proponents of the Identity Thesis tend to endorse, explicitly or implicitly, a consequentialist theory of divine justice. For they insist that God's sole purpose in punishing wrong-doers is reformative, rather than retributive. So, for example, Kinghorn says that God's administration of justice will ultimately be for the same reason that we need rules of law in the first place, namely, the "benevolent goal that people flourish."[26] In response to Arthur Holmes' critique of consequentialism, Kinghorn

[25] See, for example, Mark D. White, ed., *Retributivism: Essays on Theory and Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Michael Tonry, ed., *Retributivism Has a Past: Has It a Future?* Studies in Penal Theory and Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Ironically, some theologians, unaware of this sea change in theories of justice, denounce in the strongest terms a God of retributive justice (Stephen Finlan, *Options on Atonement in Christian Thought* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007], 97–98), not realizing that their own objection to the justice of penal substitutionary atonement depends on a view of divine justice as retributive, lest God punish the innocent on consequentialist grounds.

[26] Kinghorn, *What about God's Wrath?*, 73. A problem here is that, as Garcia notes, flourishing or well-being is a type of non-moral good, and it seems wrong to treat moral value as simply a function of non-moral value (Garcia, "Moral Perfection," 221, 229). She explains, by contrast, that on Jorge Garcia's virtue theory the whole set of moral virtues can be reduced to one over-arching virtue, viz., genuine concern for the good of persons, so that the love of persons is both the root and key component of all the virtues (229). Thus, divine moral perfection consists in "exemplifying perfect love" (230). Perhaps Kinghorn means to endorse such a virtue theory, since he is thinking of persons' good in terms of their relationship to God. Unfortunately, such a theory still neglects divine justice.

does not address the shortcomings of consequentialist theories of justice but simply doubles down in affirming a sort of Christian utilitarianism.[27] He appeals to God to direct our efforts to ensure that acts of beneficence are also equitable, which only pushes the problem upstairs, so to speak. Does God direct his acts in accordance with justice? Kinghorn responds, "I find no reason for thinking that justice must be added. . . to God's love in order to give God's actions direction."[28] Given a consequentialist theory of justice, God's love alone suffices to direct his actions, including his harsh treatment of sinners aimed at their reformation. Kinghorn declares, "God's expressions of wrath are not vindictive or emotional outbursts aimed at the punishment of unrighteous people as an ultimate goal."[29] This characterization of retributivism is, of course, a straw man, for the retributivist would agree that God's expressions of wrath are not vindictive or emotional outbursts but may nonetheless be aimed at the punishment of unrighteous people as the ultimate goal. God's wrath is an affective expression of God's retributive justice, so that the issue is not ultimately wrath but the nature of God's justice.[30] Kinghorn's endorsement of consequentialism is clearly in view when he affirms, "Expressions of divine wrath must . . . be for the ultimate, benevolent purpose God has of drawing people into relationship with himself, thereby bringing fullness of life to them."[31]

10.2.2.3.2 God's Eschatological Judgement

Not only is pure consequentialism disfavored among contemporary philosophers of law and at odds with the biblical view of divine justice, but consequentialism seems, in any case, ill-suited to serve as the justification

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[27] Kinghorn, *What about God's Wrath?*, 75–78. Cf. Arthur Holmes, *Ethics: Approaching Moral Decisions*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 43–50. In addition to Holmes' concerns about distributive justice, one of the main criticisms of consequentialist theories of justice is the fact that on such theories it may be just to punish the innocent in view of the good consequences. On the horrendous impact of consequentialism on the American penal system, see the moving account of Kathleen Dean Moore, *Pardons: Justice, Mercy, and the Public Interest* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), chap. 5.

[28] Kinghorn, *What about God's Wrath?*, 78. Holmes had complained, "What utilitarianism lacks is a principle of distributive justice that is not subject to and cannot be manipulated by the principle of utility" (Holmes, *Ethics*, 48). The principle of beneficence must therefore be supplemented by an independent principle of justice. On a pure love ethic, goods could be distributed inequitably, so long as each person is treated lovingly. Each person benefits, but nevertheless discrimination could prevail.

[29] Kinghorn, *What about God's Wrath?*, 142–143.

[30] See Kinghorn, 1–21. Biblical expressions of God's wrath, Kinghorn explains, are meant to convey both God's anger at injustice in our world and his actions to set things straight, to settle accounts, to visit punishment upon evildoers. What Kinghorn seems to fail to appreciate is that the reason that God's anger is not an "uncontrolled outburst" is because it is righteous anger, that is to say, guided by justice. Therefore in his role as Supreme Judge, God is, *pace* Kinghorn, most definitely like "a judge in a courthouse, suspending his personal feelings in order to act objectively" (5). In denying that God's acts of wrath are motivated by righteous anger, Kinghorn forgets that it is *righteous* anger, i.e., anger that is guided by divine justice that is at issue.

[31] Kinghorn, 80. God's wrath "is intended by God to lead us in some way toward reconciliation with him. That is, divine wrath is a prodding of some sort, designed to lead us to repentance and eventual reconciliation" (88–89).

for divine punishment because God's judgement is described in the Bible as ultimately eschatological. The ungodly are "storing up wrath" for themselves for God's final day of judgement (Rom 2.5). Punishment imposed at that point could seemingly serve no other purpose than retribution.[32] For all hope of reform is gone. But the damned are punished nonetheless because they deserve it. God, in effect, carries out what Kant deemed to be necessary for a just society about to dissolve: to execute any prisoners condemned to death.[33]

10.2.2.3.2.1 God's Punishment of the Damned Wessling defends God's ongoing punishment of the damned aimed at persuading them "to start down the path of spiritual transformation" but only at the admitted expense that one "is willing to allow for post-mortem opportunities for salvation in hell,"[34] a consoling but unbiblical view (Mt 25.46; II Thess 1.9). Moreover, Wessling's view either must deny God's omniscience, so that he continues to pursue a pointless action that only perpetuates suffering, or in effect transforms hell into purgatory and results in *apokatastasis*, the restoration of all things, a universalistic doctrine that is both unbiblical and condemned by the Church.[35] We may defer the question of universalism to the locus *De Christo* and *De novissimus*.[36]

No universalist, Kinghorn struggles to justify God's punishment of the damned on consequentialist grounds as an act of his benevolence aimed at their reformation. He recognizes that "We can use our God-given freedom to place ourselves eternally under God's wrath by decisively rejecting his offer to participate in the fellowship of self-giving love."[37] Indeed, at some point the opportunity for repentance will be gone: "the time for possible repentance will have passed."[38] So why does God continue to punish people

[32] The Christian consequentialist could say that punishment in hell does have a consequentialist justification, namely, the sequestration of the wicked from the community of the redeemed, just as hardened criminals are removed from society. But since God could achieve this end by simply annihilating the damned, the consequentialist will need to find some non-retributive reason for God's preserving them in existence.

[33] Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysical Elements of Justice*, 2nd ed., trans. John Ladd (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), 140.

[34] Wessling, "Divine Goodness and Love," 152.

[35] See R. T. Mullins, "Response to *Love Divine* by Jordan Wessling," (paper presented at the American Academy of Religion, San Antonio, TX, November 19, 2021). Cf. R. T. Mullins, "One Hell of a Problem for Divine Love," *Philosophia Christi* 24, no. 1 [2022]: 23–29). Mullins errs, however, in thinking that "You cannot have an ultimate defeat of evil if you have a bunch of damned people in hell continuing to engage in a sinful rebellion against God." *Au contraire,* in the biblical view of things God's defeat of evil consists precisely in his punishing the wicked.

[36] See in the interim my *Auseinandersetzung* with Thomas Talbott in my "Talbott's Universalism," *Religious Studies* 27, no. 3 (1991): 297–308; "Talbott's Universalism Once More," *Religious Studies* 29, no. 4 (1993): 497–518.

[37] Kinghorn, *What about God's Wrath?*, 148.

[38] Kinghorn, 150.

beyond that point? Kinghorn's answer seems to be: he does not. "For those in hell, God does not persist in pressing on them the truth about themselves," which Kinghorn interprets as the essence of divine wrath.[39] With no consequentialist justification for punishment, God ceases to punish the damned in hell, though they may (mistakenly) think themselves to be under God's wrath.[40] Rather he simply leaves them alone. Hell, then, is not a punishment for sin, rather "Hell is just a natural consequence of life apart from God."[41] Citing Peter Geach to the effect that "God does allow men to sin; and misery is the natural, not the arbitrarily inflicted, consequence of sin to the sinner,"[42] Kinghorn claims that "The alternative to Geach's position is to suggest that there is something of value, something good, about God devising an extra form of punishment for people in hell, over and beyond what they are naturally experiencing apart from him."[43] This is a misunderstanding of the retributivist position. The alternative to Geach's position is that the harsh treatment is not arbitrarily inflicted by God but justly inflicted and therefore something of value, something good. The punishment need not be something over and above the damned's being eternally separated from God; rather that separation is their just desert.

10.2.2.3.2.2 Natural Consequences View Wessling calls Geach's position "the *natural consequences view*."[44] It must not be confused with a consequentialist view of divine justice. On consequentialism God does punish the damned in hell for their sin with a view towards some extrinsic benefit. But on the natural consequences view, hell is not a punishment of sin flowing from divine justice but simply a natural consequence of sin. Curiously, Kinghorn offers no biblical justification for so remarkable a thesis as the claim that hell is not divine punishment for sin. To the contrary, Wessling points out that the natural consequences view "certainly does not

[39] Kinghorn, 144. Cf. his explanation:

> "Divine wrath is an intentional pattern of action from God, directed toward some individual or group of individuals, and intended for the purpose of some divine goal. . . . this goal will be a benevolent one, intended to further people's long-term flourishing. . . . I arrive at the following definition of divine wrath. Our experience of God's wrath toward us is *God pressing on us the truth about ourselves*" (91–92).

Wessling calls such a view "*divine communicative punishment*" (Wessling, "Divine Goodness and Love," 152). Kinghorn differs from Wessling in that Kinghorn recognizes that there comes a point of no return at which, presumably, God as an omniscient being knows that further communication is pointless.

[40] Kinghorn, *What about God's Wrath?*, 145; cf. 139, 142. Kinghorn inconsistently says, "They have become the kind of people who experience all of God's actions as acts of wrath instead of as acts of love and care and faithful prompting" (145). For on his view, God has ceased all such loving actions toward the damned, since he has ceased to press upon them the truth about themselves. Kinghorn also inconsistently says, as we have seen, that can use our God-given freedom to place ourselves eternally under God's wrath.

[41] Kinghorn, 145.

[42] Peter Geach, *Providence and Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 138.

[43] Kinghorn, *What about God's Wrath?*, 145–146.

[44] Wessling, "Divine Goodness and Love," 151.

sit well" with texts like I Cor 11.27–31; II Pet 2. 1–16; and Rev 16, which speak of divine wrath, judgement, condemnation, and punishment.[45] In any case, on Kinghorn's natural consequences view, it remains mysterious why God does not simply annihilate the damned and put them out of their misery, rather than allow them to suffer interminably and undeservedly what Kinghorn calls "*the worst possible situation for humans*."[46]

In general, the natural consequences view of God's response to sin is biblically inadequate.[47] Certainly sin is regarded in the Scriptures as self-destructive in its consequences, but God's response to sin is not reducible to permitting sin's natural consequences. Rather God imposes justly deserved punishments in response to sin. Already in the story of the fall in Gen 3, the words "you shall surely die" (*môṯ tāmûṯ*) occur repeatedly in the legal collections of the Pentateuch condemning criminals to death.[48] Victor Hamilton notes that all of the *môṯ tāmûṯ* passages in the OT deal with either a punishment for sin or an untimely death as the result of punishment, so that in the story of the fall the expression clearly conveys the announcement of a death sentence by divine or royal decree.[49] In the NT the forensic language is pervasive, especially in Paul's treatment of condemnation and justification in Romans. Recall Dunn's conclusion "that God's righteousness towards the peoples he has created includes wrath and judgment as well as faithfulness and salvation is clearly implicit in the sequences Rom. 1.16–18 and 3.3–6."[50] Those who deny that *dikaiosynē* is a forensic term pay insufficient attention to Rom 4.4–5, "where the forensic background is clear in the allusion to the legal impropriety of a judge 'justifying the ungodly'."[51]

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[45] Wessling, 152. Kinghorn fails to take due cognizance of the passage he himself cites, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests (*menei*) upon him" (Jn 3.36).

[46] Kinghorn, *What about God's Wrath?*, 147. I find incredible the fatuous claim by some like C. S. Lewis that God's allowing the damned to persist in their misery is actually an expression of divine benevolence.

[47] See Jay Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions*, Hebrew Bible Monographs 2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005), 11–12, who shows, against those who think of death as merely the natural consequence of sin, that God's response to sin is punitive judgment. See more broadly the classic treatment in Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1, *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 146–233.

[48] Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, The New American Commentary 1A (Nashville: B & H, 1996), 211.

[49] Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*: *Chapters 1–17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 173–174.

[50] Dunn, "New Perspective," 64–65.

[51] Dunn, "New Perspective," 64. See also Rom 5. 12–14, where the distinction between death as a consequence of sin and death as a penalty for sin becomes crucial in Paul's thinking. Death from Adam to Moses was a consequence of sin, "even over those whose sin was not like the transgression of Adam," but after the giving of the law it became as well a penalty for sin.

10.2.3 Summary

In sum, it is unbiblical and misguided to try to reduce the entire moral character of God to his love. God's moral perfection is most adequately conceived as his righteousness, which is a complex attribute comprising both his agape love and his retributive justice, both of which are plausibly essential to God.[52]

10.3 God and the Good/Right

10.3.1 God and the Good

Plato argued that things have goodness insofar as they stand in some relation to the Good, which subsists in itself as an Idea, an abstract object endowed, however, with causal power to affect the world. As the ultimate reality, the Good serves as a surrogate for God in Plato's metaphysical system. With the advent of Christian theism, the Good became identified by the Church Fathers with God himself. Robert Adams, whose *Finite and Infinite Goods* (1999) has served as a model for careful Christian metaethics in our day, calls such a position "Theistic Platonism."[53] This label can, however, be misleading. For Adams is quite clear that Theistic Platonism is not a kind of Platonism, according to which the Good is an abstract object. Rather,

[52] Kinghorn has since replied to my criticisms ("God's Moral Perfection as His Beneficent Love. Comment on Craig (2023). Is God's Moral Perfection Reducible to His Love? *Religions* 14: 140," *Religions* 14, no. 9 (2023): 1205; but his response is misdirected. He offers semantic and other philosophical considerations in support of consequentialism but fails to appreciate that the point of my argument is not to defend retributivism (which he grants is the majority view today) but to show that the biblical text requires that divine justice is in some significant measure retributive. In the third section of Kinghorn's paper we come to the anticipated discussion of biblical passages on divine retribution and punishment, but unfortunately Kinghorn declines to engage in "examinations of particular passages." Having appealed "largely to considerations in value theory in claiming that there is no final value associated with retributive justice to which God might be sensitive," he now offers no more than "some broader, methodological points." This is not an adequate response to my case based on biblical teaching about divine retributive justice. Kinghorn's broader points, moreover, run the risk of imposing on the biblical texts values foreign to their ancient Hebrew and Greek authors. God's exercising positive retributive justice is especially evident in the case of God's eschatological judgement. In his book, Kinghorn struggled valiantly to show how God's consigning people to hell could actually be for their own good; but now he states the obvious: "Craig asks why, if I view God's hard treatment of individuals as always restorative, I would not want to claim that God 'simply annihilate(s) the damned and put(s) them out of their misery'. In fact I *am* inclined toward an annihilationalist view of those who have decisively rejected all avenues that God's grace might take toward them." It would be more consistent with his consequentialist view of divine justice for Kinghorn to affirm straightforwardly annihilation of the damned, since everlasting punishment with no hope of restoration is incompatible with a purely restorative view of divine justice. But the Scripture does seem to teach that the bleak prospect of everlasting punishment awaits those who freely reject God's every effort to save them.

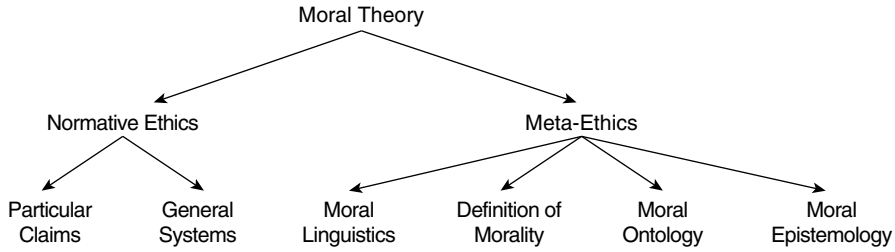
[53] Robert Merrihew Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 51.

> The role that belongs to the Form of the Good in Plato's thought is assigned to God, and the goodness of other things is understood in terms of their standing in some relation, usually conceived as a sort of resemblance, to God. . . . If God is the Good itself, then the Good is not an abstract object but a concrete (though not a physical) individual. Indeed it is a *person*, or importantly like a person.[54]

It would therefore be helpful to have some other name for this view. Given its similarity to virtue theory, Divine Virtue Theory suggests itself. But for Adams, God's goodness is not just moral goodness: "Like Plato's, mine will be a theory of nonmoral as well as moral value. The divine greatness adored in the Bible, by the mystics, and in the traditions of theistic worship is by no means exclusively moral. God is the exemplar or standard of a goodness that includes much more than moral virtue."[55] Adams, for want of a better term, refers to this sort of divine greatness by means of the word "excellence." "Moral virtues," he says, "are excellences in this sense, but Platonic excellence is not exclusively moral; beauty is a prime example of it."[56] Since our interest here, however, is in moral goodness, "Divine Virtue Theory" (DVT) seems an apt label for that aspect of God's greatness that is his moral perfection.

10.3.1.1 Divine Virtue Theory

In exploring the tangle of issues raised by DVT, we shall find it helpful to distinguish clearly various areas of moral theory:[57]



The claim that moral values and duties are rooted in God is a meta-ethical claim about moral ontology, not about moral linguistics or epistemology.[58]

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[54] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 14; cf. 42. He explains, "In its emphasis both on excellence and on a transcendent Good, my framework for ethics is broadly Platonic as well as theistic" (4).

[55] Adams, 14.

[56] Adams, 14. For a discussion of beauty in relation to God as the standard of beauty, see Daniel J. Hill, *Divinity and Maximal Greatness* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 221–227.

[57] See Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, "Moral Skepticism and Justification," in *Moral Knowledge? New Readings in Moral Epistemology*, ed. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong and Mark Timmons (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4–5.

[58] Adams makes these distinctions clearly in chapter 1.1 "The Semantics and the Metaphysics of Value" and chapter 15.1 "The Metaphysics and the Epistemology of Value." With respect to moral semantics, Adams

It is fundamentally a claim about the objectivity of moral properties, not a claim about the meaning of moral sentences or about the justification or knowledge of moral principles.

These distinctions serve to sweep away in a single stroke all those objections to theistic meta-ethics based on linguistic or epistemological considerations. For example, the theist should not be understood to be offering a definition of "good" or "right" in theistic terms (e.g., "resembling God" or "commanded by God"). The theist does offer a definition of morality in the sense that moral values and duties are to be explicated in terms of God's nature and will rather than of self-interest, social contract, common happiness, or what have you. But his aim is not to analyze the meaning of moral terms; rather he aims to provide an ontological grounding for objective moral values and duties.

Therefore objections to the effect that we can understand the meaning of statements like "Torture of political prisoners is wrong" without reference to God are quite beside the point. Similarly, when it is said that the statement "God is good" becomes trivial on theistic meta-ethics, this objection misconstrues the theistic position as a semantic claim. A statement like "God is good" may be taken as a synthetic statement expressing a proposition which is metaphysically necessary both in the sense that the proposition is true in all possible worlds and in the sense that goodness is an essential property of God. Or again, the theist will agree quite readily (and, if he is a proponent of the moral argument for God's existence, even

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freely grants "that 'good' does not mean the same as 'resembles God', though I do favor the view that the goodness of finite things consists in a sort of resemblance to God. It is not the meaning of 'good' but the nature of goodness that I mean to analyze" (Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 15). Developments in the philosophy of language during the second half of the twentieth century showed how to distinguish "questions of the natures of things from questions of meaning, and to take the former seriously as metaphysical rather than semantical questions" (15). Most famously, it is claimed, for example, that it is the nature of water to be H_2O, so that the property of being water is, necessarily, identical with the property of being H_2O; but the word "water" does not *mean* H_2O. It is noteworthy that Adams equates the reality of moral values with their objectivity: "the way we speak about 'goodness' in contexts where we mean excellence treats it as a *property*, and as one that objects of evaluation possess (or lack) independently of whether we now think they do. . . . These considerations strongly favor *realism* about the good; as candidates for the role of the good, that is, they favor properties possessed *objectively*" (18).

With respect to moral epistemology, Adams contends that "the theistic framework for ethics that I favor burdens substantive ethical thinking with no epistemological problems that it does not already have . . . because it does not require us to know anything about God, as such, before we can have knowledge, or adequately grounded belief, in ethics" (354). Even Adams' Divine Command Theory of the morally right (according to which our duties are constituted by divine commands) is not a theory about how we come to *know* our moral duties. He explains that his moral theory is a case in which the order of knowing is not the same as the order of being. "In the order of being, on my theory, the divine nature and the divine commands are prior, or at least foundational, in relation to mundane goodness and wrongness. In the order of knowing, however, one needs quite a range of beliefs about mundane goodness and wrongness in order to have a basis for my theory or any other about the nature of goodness and wrongness" (356).

insist) that we do not need to know or even believe that God exists in order to discern objective moral values or to recognize our moral duties.

The question raised by moral ontology is whether there is some objective norm determining good and evil which is ultimate and absolute. To say that it is ultimate is to say that explanation stops with it, and to say that it is absolute is to say that its value is not merely relative to some other end. Classical theism provides such a standard. For according to classical theism, God's own perfectly good nature supplies the absolute and ultimate standard against which all mundane things are measured. God is the locus and source of moral value. He is by nature loving, generous, just, faithful, kind, and so forth. On Adams' account things are good insofar as they faithfully reflect or resemble the divine nature.

> It is with respect to the divine nature that God must be faithfully imaged by other good things. A thing can be good by imitating a contingent property of God; but that is because the divine nature is manifested in the contingent properties too. They do not define the divine goodness. The standard of goodness is defined by the divine nature, and thus is defined for all possible worlds (assuming that God exists necessarily).[59]

The closer the resemblance, the greater the goodness. Nevertheless, "The resemblance of other goods to the supreme Good is profoundly imperfect; in that sense it transcends them."[60] Adams emphasizes that resemblance is holistic resemblance rather than mere sharing of properties. He suggests that "the difference between resemblances to God that do and do not constitute virtues or excellences is analogous to the difference between good portraits (by which I mean faithful portraits) and caricatures. The excellence of other things besides God will consist, then, in the *faithfulness* of their imaging of God."[61]

Garcia notes that although there is a surprising amount of agreement about lists of moral virtues, a DVT account of divine moral perfection cannot plausibly hold that it consists in God's perfectly exemplifying all the moral virtues there are, for some virtues, such as temperance or courage, have no divine equivalent.[62] Adams recognizes this fact, observing that "Some of the most admired of human excellences, in love, artistic creativity, and moral virtue, seem to depend on our finitude, and even on some of our

[59] Adams, 49.
[60] Adams, 7.
[61] Adams, 33. He adds that it is plausible that the excellence of a finite thing "*consists in resembling God in a way that could serve God as a reason for loving the thing*" (36).
[62] Garcia, "Moral Perfection," 230.

most painful limitations, our mortality, frailty, weakness, and liability to frustration, temptation, and error."[63] But he thinks that "The most important basis for a response to this objection is still the point that the imaging of God by creatures is a matter of distant and fragmentary resemblance. No excellence of creatures can be regarded as a detailed copy of something in God. It will be only in certain respects that our virtues resemble or image God."[64] We ought to affirm that God is unsurpassably virtuous. Garcia suggests that divine moral perfection be understood, not in terms of perfectly exemplifying the whole list of virtues, but as exemplifying perfect love, which is at the root of all human virtues.[65] We have seen reason to amend this account to say that God exemplifies perfect love and perfect justice, or that he is perfectly righteous.

10.3.1.2 Objections to Divine Virtue Theory

Are there, then, overriding objections to DVT that would disqualify it as a plausible account of objective moral values? We shall defer discussion of the famous Euthyphro Dilemma until we have given an account of moral duties as grounded in God.[66] In response to a debate on the foundations of objective moral values and duties,[67] Wesley Morriston, after clearing up some possible misconceptions about the theory,[68] voices two complaints. First, he finds it strange that the paradigm of moral goodness "embodies a degree of love (and so on) that is completely unattainable for us. . . . It isn't in general true that the degree to which one possesses some property is measured by one's distance from an absolute maximum."[69] To the contrary I should say that we want the Good to embody absolute perfection – how could it be anything less? There is no problem in finite persons' possessing different degrees of goodness though all fall infinitely short of perfection. Analogously, every natural number falls infinitely short of the least transfi-

[63] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 31.
[64] Adams, 31.
[65] Garcia, "Moral Perfection," 230. On such an account, God would contain all the human virtues eminently, i.e., he is their source. Adams allows that "Human limitations may be inextricably involved in the only ways that such perceptiveness and care can be manifested in human life, but it does not follow that there cannot be analogues of these excellences, without the limitations, in God" (Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 31).
[66] See *infra*, 472.
[67] William Lane Craig and Erik J. Wielenberg, *A Debate on God and Morality: What Is the Best Account of Objective Moral Values and Duties?*, ed. Adam Lloyd Johnson (New York: Routledge, 2021).
[68] He corrects, in particular, Michael Huemer's misimpression that DVT holds that the reason God is good is because he has properties like *being loving*, etc. Rather these properties are good-making because God has them. This is not, *pace* Morriston, a relation of "metaphysical dependence," since one is not ontologically committed to properties, but rather of explanatory priority. It is good to be loving because God is loving.
[69] Wesley Morriston, "Does Morality Have a Theological Foundation?," in Craig and Wielenberg, *God and Morality*, 127.

nite cardinal $\aleph_0$, but they are nonetheless ordered by a *greater than* relation that facilitates comparison of their greatness.

Second, Morriston does not see "why there would have to be some particular person who is maximally good in order for the rest of us to be even a little bit good. . . . the addition of a maximally loving and just person to the world would not make the ordinary loves and just dealings of ordinary persons any better (or their opposites any worse)."[70] This is not, however, so much an objection to a paradigmatic conception of the Good as just a refusal of it. Given that God is the paradigm for moral goodness, he is the moral yardstick (or meter bar) that determines what little good we exhibit.[71] It is not as though there is some justice or goodness in the world which is improved by adding God, but that the existence of such a paradigmatic Good explains why there is justice and goodness in the world at all.

Michael Huemer fails to understand the paradigmatic approach to grounding moral values, for he speaks of grounding them, not in the greatest conceivable being but merely in a benevolent creator of the universe, which no classical theist would think adequate.[72] Again, his complaint that a theory like Adams' never really explains why anything is good/bad is merely a repudiation of a paradigmatic approach to determining moral values. For the reason something is good/bad according to the theory is its degree of resemblance to God. Since Huemer is fond of scientific analogies, consider the debate among palaeoanthropologists over what it is to be human. There is no consensus concerning necessary and sufficient conditions for classifying a hominin as human.[73] But if we take ourselves as paradigms of what it is to be human, then we can use the degree of resemblance to that paradigm as a way of speaking objectively of prehistoric human beings. A paradigmatic approach to moral values does not preclude describing the paradigm as loving, generous, faithful, kind, and so forth, without thinking that those properties make the paradigm good. As least Morriston sees this point, which Huemer does not. Finally, Huemer's objection that Adams' theory is not an objectivist theory of moral values is maladroit, since on that theory moral values are, in line with Huemer's

[70] Morriston, 127, 129.

[71] Although Morriston notes some disanalogies between God and other paradigms – such as the contingency of the meter bar's setting the standard or the ease of something's being a meter in length or the public accessibility of the paradigmatic standard – , Morriston does not press these, since "these analogies are meant only to provide examples of cases in which a familiar property . . . can plausibly be identified with resemblance in a certain respect . . . to a single [paradigmatic] standard" (Morriston, 121).

[72] Michael Huemer, "Groundless Morals," in Craig and Wielenberg, *God and Morality*, 149–165.

[73] See Ian Tattersall, "The Genus *Homo*," *Inference* 2, no. 1 (February 2016), http://inference-review.com/article/the-genus-homo.

own definition of "objective morality,"[74] attitude-independent, being rooted in the divine *nature*, not the divine will, and so independent of divine *attitudes*. In short, these objections to DVT are not nearly strong enough to constitute defeaters of it.

10.3.2 God and the Right

10.3.2.1 Divine Command Theory

Consider now whether theism can provide an adequate foundation for objective moral duties. The second part of Adams' moral theory is his account of objective moral duties in terms of divine commands, or Divine Command Theory (DCT).[75] Adams assumes the same view of the relation between the meaning of "right" and "wrong" and the properties of rightness and wrongness that he advocated regarding the relation between the meaning of "good" and the property of goodness. "The nature of moral obligation is not given by the meanings of the words, such as 'right', 'wrong', 'obligation', and 'ought', that are used to express it."[76] As in the case of goodness, moral semantics leaves metaphysical questions regarding the reality and nature of obligation open.

In Adams' view DCT can be seen as an idealized version of our societal obligations. For our relationship with God is in a broad sense an interpersonal and, hence, social relationship, and divine commands' constituting our moral obligations is analogous to non-moral obligations' arising from directives issued by human institutions. Adams' analogy is intuitively appealing. Our societal obligations and prohibitions are typically grounded in imperatives issued by a qualified authority. To illustrate, if some random person were to tell me to pull my car over, I would have no legal obligation to do so. But if a policeman were to issue such a command, I would have a legal obligation to obey. The difference in the two cases lies in the authority of the persons who issued the commands: one is qualified to do so, while the other is not. Now, similarly, moral obligations arise as a result of imperatives issued by a competent authority. And as the paradigmatic Good, God certainly fills that role. As Adams says, "it contributes importantly to our reasons for complying with demands if the personal characteristics of the

[74] "There is 'objective morality', provided that there are truths about what is good and bad, or right and wrong, which obtain *independent of the attitudes of observers* toward the objects of evaluation" (Huemer, "Groundless Morals," 150).
[75] See pt. 3 "The Good and the Right" of Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*.
[76] Adams, 234.

demander are excellent or admirable in relevant respects. This desideratum is spectacularly overfulfilled in the case of divine commands."[77]

Matthew Jordan lists the following properties, revealed by an examination of our moral experience, which must characterize any adequate theory of moral duty:[78]

> Objectivity: The truth of a moral proposition is independent of the beliefs of any particular human being or human community.
>
> Normativity: Moral considerations, as such, constitute reasons for acting.
>
> Categoricity: Moral reasons are reasons for all human persons, regardless of what goals or desires they may have.
>
> Authority: Moral reasons are especially weighty reasons.
>
> Knowability: In normal circumstances, adult human beings have epistemic access to morally salient considerations.
>
> Unity (Individuality): A human person can have a moral reason to act or to refrain from acting in ways that affect no one other than the agent who performs the act.

A DCT of ethics, such as has been articulated by Adams and others,[79] seems to have these properties. As the perfect being, God is the paradigm of goodness, and things are good insofar as they resemble God. Thus, moral values are grounded in the nature of God. Our moral duties are in turn grounded in God's commands, which must be consistent with God's nature. One of the deficiencies of atheistic Platonism is that it lacks any basis for objective moral duties because the Good is an impersonal, abstract object that cannot issue imperatives. But that want is supplied by theism. God's moral nature is expressed in relation to us in the form of divine commands

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[77] Adams, 253. He explains,

> "when I say that an action's being morally obligatory consists in its being commanded by God, and that an action's being wrong consists in its being contrary to a divine command, I assume that the character and commands of God satisfy certain conditions. More precisely, I assume that they are consistent with the divine nature having properties that make God an ideal candidate, and the salient candidate, for the semantically indicated role of the supreme and definitive Good. . . . It is only the commands of a definitively good God, who, for example, is not cruel but loving, that are a good candidate for the role of defining moral obligation" (250; cf. 255).

[78] In Matthew Carey Jordan, "Divine Attitudes and the Nature of Morality: A Defense of a Theistic Account of Deontic Properties" (PhD dissertation, The Ohio State University, 2009).

[79] Philip L. Quinn, *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978); Janine Marie Idziak, *Divine Command Morality: Historical and Contemporary Readings* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979); William Alston, "What Euthyphro Should Have Said," in *Philosophy of Religion: A Reader and Guide*, ed. Wm. L. Craig (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 283–98. It is striking that David Brink, "The Autonomy of Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism,* ed. Michael Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 152–154, takes no cognizance of these authors, nor of the alternative they offer; the only theistic account he knows is voluntarism, which is not defended by any philosopher in my acquaintance.

which constitute our moral duties or obligations. Far from being arbitrary, these commands reflect God's moral nature. They are objective, normative, categorical, authoritative, and individual. Moreover, God reveals his moral will to mankind both in conscience and in Scripture, so that our duties are to some extent knowable.

10.3.2.2 Objections to Divine Command Theory

Erik Wielenberg raises three objections to DCT's account of moral obligation.[80] It seems to me that these objections can be dispatched fairly quickly:

First, Wielenberg objects that it is implausible that only divine commands are sufficient by themselves to generate moral obligations. In moral experience we surely encounter a multiplicity of sources of moral obligation. In response, we may agree that in moral experience we encounter multiple sources of moral obligation, but that fact is consistent with divine commands' being the ultimate source of authority in a hierarchy of such sources. Our moral experience of objective moral duties does not reveal to us the ultimate source of our moral obligations, but merely their objectivity, universality, and finality. Hence, one can be aware of one's moral obligations without being aware that God's commands are the final source of our moral obligations. While the ability to trace the source of our moral obligations to God's commands may be part of a moral argument for God's existence,[81] such a claim is not incumbent upon the Christian systematic theologian, who may content himself with laying out DCT as his preferred account of moral obligation.

Second, Wielenberg objects that my version of DCT implies that psychopaths have no moral obligations, since they fail to perceive them, which contradicts my view that God's commands obligate all people. The reply is easy: When I spoke of "all people," I meant normal people who are capable of making moral choices, not, for example, infants, the mentally retarded, the comatose, or the mentally ill. If psychopaths have a sense of right and wrong, then they are morally responsible for their actions; if not, then they are not.

Third, Wielenberg objects that on DCT God exacerbates the evil in the world by issuing commands to people who he knew would not obey them, so that their evil acts become not merely evil but wrong. It is worth noting in passing that this objection assumes that God has middle knowledge, which is not implied by DCT and is, in fact, denied by Adams. Still, since

[80] Wielenberg, in Craig and Wielenberg, *God and Morality*, 44–46.
[81] See this *Systematic Philosophical Theology*, vol. IIb, Excursus on Natural Theology.

we have affirmed divine middle knowledge, we may reply: (1) We are every one of us (*modulo* the above caveats) fallen creatures, who not only do evil things but who are infected with evil.[82] In our morally fallen condition, we find ourselves estranged from the holy God. God issues his commands to us for our own good. Not to communicate his will to people in such a state would doom them to remaining in their evil condition, a state of alienation from God. In this fallen state, they would never be able to enjoy communion with God and find eternal happiness. God is not content to allow us to remain in such an evil state but does everything possible to save us. By communicating to people his moral law, God helps people to see that they have cut themselves off from God and to turn to God and to receive his grace. God's giving us the moral law makes it possible for us to understand the need for grace and accept it. (2) God's very nature could give him reason for rendering evildoers morally responsible. Consider, for example, God's compassion for the victims of evil. His compassion could motivate him to make evil actions wrongdoing, so as to punish evildoers. Or consider God's fairness. It would be unfair to hold good doers morally responsible for their actions but to exempt evildoers. Holding only some people morally responsible for their actions would be to treat persons inequitably, which is contrary to God's nature. (3) By including evildoers in his commands, God is able to punish them for their evil deeds. On commonly accepted theories of retributive justice, this is a good which can be actualized only by rendering their bad actions wrong via a divine command. Since God is perfectly good, he decides to actualize the good of retributive justice. Thus, God's commands do not exacerbate the evil in the world; on the contrary, they increase the good in the world.

In response to Wielenberg and my exchange, Morriston and Huemer offer further objections to the explanatory adequacy of DCT's account of moral obligation, which I shall consider in our discussion of the moral argument for God's existence.[83] Here I shall consider only Huemer's complaint that DCT "does not actually explain obligation, because no explanation has been given for why anyone should obey God's commands."[84] A moral theory which ultimately stops explanation somewhere may, however, still enjoy the advantage of greater explanatory depth than its rivals.[85] Explaining our moral obligations as arising from divine commands exhibits such explanatory depth, even if the theorist, in response to the question,

[82] See further this *Systematic Philosophical Theology*, vol. III, *De homine*, pt. II,: Man as Sinner, 2.44 The Nature of Sin.
[83] See this *Systematic Philosophical Theology*, vol. IIb, Excursus on Natural Theology 6. The Moral Argument.
[84] Huemer, "Groundless Morals," 152.
[85] As emphasized by Shelly Kagan, *The Limits of Morality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 13–14.

"Why are we obligated to obey God's commands?", finally says, "Every theory must start somewhere, and my starting point is that obligations are constituted by imperatives issued by a qualified authority. As the Good itself, God is qualified to issue moral imperatives."

Huemer acknowledges that we must all have some unexplained facts, but he insists that "not just *any* claimed obligation is a suitable starting point. The brute, unexplained moral axioms should be things that seem obvious when one thinks about them."[86] I, for one, see no reason to think that on atheism, the moral axioms to which Huemer appeals would be obvious. But never mind. What about the facts to which DCT appeals? Here Huemer's failure to grasp adequately the concept of God comes to expression: "But it just *isn't* obvious in that way that, if there were a creator of the universe, we'd be obligated to obey that creator. So what if He made us? What if you found out that you were actually created by Satan – would that show that you are *morally obligated* to obey Satan's will in all things?"[87] This *pièce de résistance* is predicated on Huemer's inadequate conception of God as merely the creator of the universe rather than the maximally great being.

Huemer rejoins, "You could say that we have to obey God because God, unlike Satan, is *perfectly good*. But this requires there to be independent truths about *goodness*. But if we have facts about good and bad, then we don't need God to explain morality; we could just directly explain morality in terms of good and bad."[88] But on DCT there are, indeed, as we have seen, attitude-independent truths about goodness, and normative ethics' attempt to explain moral duty in terms of good and bad arguably gets things exactly backwards. For, as David Baggett explains, it is not the case that we are obligated to do something because we have moral reasons to do it; rather our being obligated to do something provides us a moral reason to do it.[89]

Moreover, why think that the proponent of DCT must stop explanation in brute facts? In answer to the question, "Why are we obligated to obey God's commands?", the most straightforward answer is, "Because God commands us to!" At first blush such an answer might seem to launch us on an infinite regress, for now the objector will demand, "Why are we obligated to obey God's command to obey his commands?" But there is no need to embark on such a regress. Rather DCT's definition of moral obligation should be understood as an impredicative definition, one that includes itself. Impredicative definitions are not inherently paradoxical. For example, the set of all things

[86] Huemer, "Groundless Morals," 153.
[87] Huemer, 153.
[88] Huemer, 153.
[89] David Baggett, "Psychopathy and Supererogation," in Craig and Wielenberg, *God and Morality*, 146. Cf. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 238.

mentioned in this book is itself mentioned in this book. No paradox there! So suppose God has issued to us the following command: "Obey everything I command you!" If we ask, why obey that command, the answer lies not in a further command (leading to an infinite regress) but in the command itself. The command to obey everything God has commanded us is one of the things God has commanded us to do. So if God's commands constitute our moral obligations, we are obligated to do everything God has commanded us, including obeying his command to do everything he has commanded us.

Huemer's objection that this last account is "obviously circular" fails to reckon with the nature of impredicative definitions. There is nothing objectionably circular about saying that we are obligated to do everything that God commands us – including that command. Huemer gravely warns that such "self-referentiality is a well-known source of paradox, so one had better be careful in appealing to it."[90] But self-referentiality or impredicativity is not inherently paradoxical. One has to construct the situation in a particular way in order to generate a paradox. One thinks of Russell's illustration of the village barber who shaves everyone who does not shave himself or the set of all sets which are not members of themselves, which brought down naive set theory. Huemer is certainly correct that one can stumble unawares into paradox, but he has not demonstrated that there is any paradox in DCT as I have articulated it, nor do I see any paradox looming. Huemer further says that if this answer is acceptable, "then the following would also be an acceptable explanation: you're morally obligated to obey *my* commands, because I command you to do so."[91] That all depends on who is speaking in the first person (recall our illustration of the policeman commanding one to pull over). If it is God, then the theory is acceptable; but if it is Michael Huemer, the theory is utterly implausible, since it is not the paradigm of goodness who speaks but a finite and morally imperfect being. The problem with Huemer's parody is not self-referentiality but the nature of the source of moral value and duty.

In sum, these objections fail to subvert DCT's account of the objectivity of moral obligation. I believe that theism grounds the objectivity of both moral values and moral duties in an explanatorily deep way.

10.3.3 The Euthyphro Dilemma

Ever since Plato the claim that moral values and duties are founded in God has been criticized as problematic. In a famous dilemma in his dialogue *Euthyphro,* Plato asks, in effect, whether something is good because it is approved by God or whether something is approved by God because

[90] Huemer, "Groundless Morals," 153.
[91] Huemer, 153.

it is good. Either horn of this dilemma has been said to lead to untenable consequences. If we say that some action is good for the mere reason that God wills it, then morality is fundamentally arbitrary. God could have willed that cruelty be good and love evil, and we should have been obliged to hate others and seek to do them harm. Not only is this unconscionable, but it appears to make the claim that God is good vacuous. To claim that God is good seems to mean no more than that God does whatever he wants! On the other hand, if God wills that we perform some action because it is the right or a good thing to do, then moral values are not based in God after all. In that case, it seems that moral values exist independently of God, in contradiction to the claim that moral values are grounded in God. If God were not to exist, then objective moral values and duties would exist anyway.

What we have already said enables us to respond readily to this apparent dilemma. We may escape the horns of the dilemma by formulating a third alternative. DCT in conjunction with DVT supplies such an alternative: Our moral duties are constituted by the commands of an essentially just and loving God. Thus, the morally good/bad is determined by reference to God's nature; the morally right/wrong is determined by reference to his will.[92]

For any action *A* and moral agent *S*, we can explicate the notions of moral requirement, prohibition, and permission of *A* for *S* as follows:

> *A* is *required* of *S* if and only if a just and loving God commands *S* to do *A*.
>
> *A* is *forbidden* to *S* if and only if a just and loving God commands *S* not to do *A*.
>
> *A* is *permitted* for *S* if and only if a just and loving God does not command *S* not to do *A*.

[92] Why not, then, take our moral obligations to be imposed by God's will rather than his command, as suggested by Mark C. Murphy, "Divine Command, Divine Will, and Moral Obligation," *Faith and Philosophy* 15, no. 1 (1998): 3–27? Adams plausibly replies that in the absence of a command, God's merely willing that we do something does not obligate us to do it (Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 260–62). A command is required to create rather than simply communicate an obligation. The requirement that there be a command is fully consistent with holding that the grounds or cause or source of the command lies in the divine will, "inasmuch as divine commands, as voluntary acts, must necessarily have their grounds or cause or source in the divine will" (Adams, 262). NB that a command may be communicated to us without our being aware of the source of the command but merely of the moral demand that the command places upon us. "The demand need not take the form of an explicit command or legislation; it may be an expectation more subtly communicated; but the demand must actually be made" (246), or, more accurately, the command must actually be made even though we are aware of only the demand (cf. 263–264, 363). Murphy's view cannot make sense of persons, such as Scripture contemplates, who have violated God's will but who have not committed a transgression, since they have not received a divine command (see this *Systematic Philosophical Theology*, vol. III, *De homine*, pt. II, Man as Sinner, 2.44 The Nature of Sin).

Since our moral duties are grounded in the divine commands, they are not independent of God, nor, plausibly, is God bound by moral duties, since he presumably does not issue commands to himself.

If God does not fulfill moral duties, then what content can be given to the claim that he is good? God may be said to be good in the sense that he possesses unsurpassable moral virtue – and he does so essentially. Thus, God's axiological perfection should not be understood in terms of duty-fulfillment, but in terms of virtue. This conception helps us to understand the sense in which God is to be praised: not in the sense of commendation for fully executing his duties or even for his acts of supererogation, but rather in the sense of adoration for his axiological perfection.

Here Kant's distinction between *following a rule* and acting in *accordance with a rule* has proved helpful. God may act naturally in ways which for us would be rule-following and so constitutive of goodness in the sense of fulfilling our moral duties, so that God can be said similarly to be good in an analogical way. This fact also supplies the key to the arbitrariness objection. For our duties are determined by the commands, not merely of a supreme potentate, but of a just and loving God.

It is interesting to observe the evolution of Adams' view on this matter. Initially he was content to claim, in line with the Identity Thesis, that our moral duties are constituted by the commands of a loving God.[93] But as a result of critique by the eminent ethicist Alasdair MacIntyre, Adams came to acknowledge "the importance of God's justice for the grounding of a divine command theory," which "was wrongly neglected in some of my previous papers on divine command metaethics."[94] MacIntyre had insisted that we should not acknowledge an obligation to obey anyone "unless and until we have adequate rational grounds for believing that person to be in possession of just authority over us and that supreme authority requires the possession of justice in supreme measure by the person exercising that authority," where the relevant concept of justice is that of one's according "the justice of desert."[95] He argued:

> Power without justice may give us reasons to obey commands because we fear to do otherwise; beneficence without justice may give us

[93] Robert Merrihew Adams, "A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness," in *Religion and Morality: A Collection of Essays,* ed. Gene Outka and John P. Reeder, Jr. (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1973), 318–347.
[94] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 254.
[95] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Which God Ought We to Obey and Why?," *Faith and Philosophy* 3, no. 4 (1986): 370, 360.

> reasons to obey commands either from gratitude or because we have been provided with expectations of future beneficence. So that if we know of some god. . . that he is powerful, or if we know of God that he is beneficent, we may indeed have good reason to obey the relevant set of commands, but not at all the kind of reason that we need to treat obedience as obligatory.[96]

It might be objected that the requirement that God be by nature just is viciously circular in that acting justly is already a concept of acting dutifully, in contrast to acting lovingly. But Adams rightly rejects the assumption that being just entails acting dutifully. He says:

> My response to this objection turns on the relation of justice to obligation or duty. It depends on what I have called a "thin theory" of justice. . . . certainly philosophers sometimes speak of justice in a sense in which it essentially includes discharging one's obligations and doing one's duty. But that is not the sense in which it seems to me important to say that God is just. God is not praised as dutiful or law-abiding. The justice for which God is praised belongs in the first instance to the ethics of excellence or virtue rather than to that of obligation. . . . It does not essentially involve being under obligation, and can therefore belong to God even if God is not subject to obligation in the same sense as we are. God's justice, so understood, grounds obligation, rather than being grounded in it. God's commands, that is, spring from God's way of relating to creatures and their interests; and it is partly because the latter is taken to be an ideal candidate for the role of definitive exemplar of the relevant sort of excellence, that God's commands can plausibly be taken as constituting moral obligation.[97]

On such an account God can be simply described as acting in accordance with justice's demands though not under obligation. In the same way that he is loving, he is also just. In other words our obligations are constituted by the commands of a perfectly righteous God.

Thus, God's commands are not arbitrary, and we need not trouble ourselves about counterfactuals with impossible antecedents like "If God were to command child abuse. . . ." On the customary semantics, counterfactuals with impossible antecedents have no non-vacuous truth value. Even if we

[96] MacIntyre, "Which God?," 364.

[97] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 254–255. Adams had earlier written, "One important excellence is justice. It clearly matters to the persuasive power of God's character, as a source of moral requirement, that the divine will is just. Here, if my theory of obligation is not to be circular, I must be using a 'thin theory' of justice, so to speak, which does not presuppose moral obligation as such" (254).

reject the customary semantics and allow that some counterfactuals with impossible antecedents may be non-vacuously true or false, how are we to assess the truth value of a statement with an antecedent like this? It is like wondering whether, if there were a round square, its area would equal the square of one of its sides. And what would it matter how one answered, since what is imagined is logically incoherent? I do not see that DCT is committed to the non-vacuous truth of the counterfactual in question nor that anything of significance hangs on one's thinking it to be non-vacuously true or false.

Nonetheless, the fact that God is not duty-bound should alert us to the fact that he may well have prerogatives (for example, taking human life at his discretion) which are forbidden to us. Taking the life of an innocent person is something we have no right to do; but God is not similarly restricted. God's having no duties also helps to explain how God can command a person to perform an action which would be sinful were the person to undertake such an action on his own initiative, but which is his moral duty in virtue of God's command. The most celebrated example is Abraham's sacrificing his son Isaac, an act which would have been murder in the absence of any command of God but which became Abraham's moral duty in light of the divine command given him.[98] This is not to say that God can bring it about that murder be good, but rather that he can command an act which would have been murder had it been undertaken in the absence of a divine command. This is also not to say that God could have brought it about that it be a general moral duty for people to kill one another. The case of Abraham and Isaac is the exception that proves the rule. Issuing a general command that we should seek

[98] See Adams' discussion in chapter 12 of *Finite and Infinite Goods*. Adams says, "We want to know whether one should believe that God really commanded the sacrifice" and appears to answer negatively (290–291). But that question is answered for us affirmatively in virtue of the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, which we have defended. Jesus would doubtless have believed that God really commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Adams thus admits that "our ethical convictions can be in tension with some views of scriptural interpretation and authority" (370). Adams thinks that any positive value attaching to the sacrifice "must be a symbolic or at least an expressive value, dependent on the meaning of the act. But what good meaning would the act have?" (288). The immediate value of God's testing Abraham is the display of Abraham's devotion to God; and from a NT perspective the sacrifice is symbolic of Christ's voluntary sacrifice for our redemption (Heb 11.17–19).

Unfortunately, Adams' discussion is muddied by the epistemological question of whether Abraham could be justified in thinking that God had issued such a command to him. Adams' conclusion that "in any cultural context in which it is possible to worry about Abraham's Dilemma" – that is, a context in which child sacrifice is not taken to be permissible – "it will hardly be credible that a good God has commanded the sort of sacrifice that is envisaged there (290)" is compatible with our thinking that God did issue such a command to Abraham, even if we would rationally reject such a command if issued to us. Whether Abraham acted irrationally in obeying such a command would depend on whether in his situation, prior to the Mosaic law, there was some sort of divine prohibition of child sacrifice and, if so, whether he had reason to think that God was overriding his general command.

one another's harm would be contrary to God's just and loving nature, but in the extraordinary case of Abraham and Isaac, it was not unloving or unjust of God to so try Abraham's devotion, and God had good reasons for testing him so severely.

If one should demand, "Why pick God's nature as determinative of the Good?" the answer is that God, by definition, is a maximally great being, and a being which is the paradigm of goodness is greater than one which merely exemplifies goodness. Unless we are nihilists, we have to recognize some ultimate standard of value, and God is the least arbitrary stopping point. The Euthyphro objection therefore fails to undermine theistic-based meta-ethics.

10.3.4 Summary

In sum, a theistic meta-ethics that is a conjunction of Divine Virtue Theory and Divine Command Theory provides a plausible account of the objectivity of moral values and duties consistent with the biblical view of a perfectly righteous God.

10.4 Divine Freedom and Perfection

We now come to a third fascinating question in connection with God's goodness: is God's moral perfection compatible with his freedom? Certain contemporary philosophers, preeminently William Rowe, have argued that God's freedom and moral perfection are not compatible and that therefore a logical incoherence exists at the very heart of traditional theism.[99] It would follow that God, as traditionally conceived, does not exist. Thus, this challenge is of paramount importance.

10.4.1 Alleged Incoherence of Divine Freedom and Perfection

Rowe's argument takes the form of a dilemma for traditional theism: either there is a best possible world or there is not. If there is a best possible world, then God, being morally perfect, must bring it about. In that case, God is

[99] William L. Rowe, *Can God Be Free?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), as well as earlier publications; cf. Erik J. Wielenberg, "A Morally Unsurpassable God Must Create the Best," *Religious Studies* 40 (2004): 43–62; Jordan Howard Sobel, *Logic and Theism: Arguments for and against Beliefs in God* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 470–473, both discussed by Bruce Langtry, *God, the Best, and Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 85–89. See also Daniel Rubio, "God Meets Satan's Apple: The Paradox of Creation," *Philosophical Studies* 175, no. 12 (2018): 2987–3004, who would escape the incoherence only by contending that "no world would be irrational or immoral for God to create. Even arbitrarily bad ones" (2988).

not free to refrain from bringing about such a world. On the other hand, if there is no best possible world, then for any world that God could have brought about, there is a better world that he could have chosen instead. But then it is possible that there exist a being who is better than God is, namely, a being who chooses to bring about a better world than God does. Therefore, since God's moral goodness is thus surpassable, God is not morally perfect. Thus, we must reject either God's freedom or God's moral perfection.

Following Thomas Senor,[100] we may formulate Rowe's basic argument as follows:

1. Either there is a best possible world or there is an infinite hierarchy of ever better worlds.
2. If there is a best possible world, then God is not free to refrain from bringing about that world.
3. If there is an infinite hierarchy of ever better worlds, then God is not perfectly good.
4. Therefore, either God is not free or God is not perfectly good.

Since God, if he exists, is essentially free and essentially perfect, it follows that God does not exist. We may agree that denying God's essential freedom or perfection is not a viable escape route and that therefore the classical theist must challenge the premises of the argument.[101]

In exploring these options, it will be helpful to clear up some ambiguity as to what is meant by a "possible world" in the context of this argument. Typically, by a possible world, one means a maximal state of affairs that is broadly logically possible. But in the context of this argument it seems advisable to use the word more restrictedly. For, in the first place, God's existing will be included in such a maximal state of affairs. But we should not want to say that God actualizes his own existence, for that would be viciously circular. So God does not actualize possible worlds as such, unless we endorse the claim, previously challenged, that God in actualizing one conjunct of a conjunctive state of affairs, actualizes the

[100] Thomas D. Senor, "Defending Divine Freedom," in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Jonathan L. Kvanvig (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1:171.

[101] Against Senor, who thinks that when philosophers conclude that there is no God because they take themselves to have shown that no being could have one of the properties historically attributed to God, they are gaining a rhetorical advantage that they have not earned in the argument they have provided. For when theists understand "God" as a supernatural kind term, its intensional content is something like "the personal creator who revealed himself to the Hebrew people" (Senor, "Defending Divine Freedom," 172–173). The problem with Senor's claim is that, as we have seen, the God who is revealed in Hebrew Scripture is revealed as perfectly good.

entire conjunction.[102] Second, since every world includes God's existence and God is infinitely good, every possible world seems to be equally good in virtue of God's existence.[103] Assessing the comparative worth of possible worlds requires us to consider in addition to God's existence the existence of the things God has created. In that case, rather than weigh the comparative goodness of maximal states of affairs, which may be impossible to do, we may as well focus on the created orders that God might make and ask about their comparative goodness. Many interpreters of Rowe's argument take it to concern "worlds" in the sense of created orders. It is for that reason that I used the deliberately vague locution of "bring about" rather than "actualize" or "create" with respect to possible worlds.

Still, a fateful ambiguity exists concerning the notion of a possible "world" in the context of this argument. As we saw in our discussion of divine middle knowledge,[104] God is confronted with a world-type comprised of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom which are true prior to and, hence, independent of the divine decree of a created order. As a result, there are created orders which in themselves are broadly logically possible for God to create but which are infeasible for him in view of the world-type-for-God that is true.[105] For precisely this reason we cannot say with Bruce Langtry that God's choice concerns all contingent states of affairs,[106] for the states of affairs corresponding to true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are contingent but obtain logically prior to God's choice. Notice that this is the case whether or not God has middle knowledge, so long as the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are true prior to the divine decree.[107] So some thinkers have opined that Rowe's argument can proceed simply on the basis of the comparative value of feasible created orders in the absence of middle knowledge. But such an opinion is too quick. For in order to make a rational and morally responsible choice amongst competing orders of creation, God must have middle knowledge in order to choose. Without

[102] Recall our discussion of divine omnipotence *supra*, 434.

[103] One thinks of Georg Cantor's regarding God as the Absolute Infinite, which cannot be surpassed by any greater infinite cardinality. See A. W. Moore *The Infinite* (London: Routledge, 1990), 127–128. For a brief discussion of the complication posed by God's infinite goodness for the value of a possible world, see Dean Zimmerman, "Resisting Rowe's No-Best-World Argument for Atheism," in *Quo Vadis, Metaphysics? Essays in Honor of Peter van Inwagen*, ed. Mirosław Szatkowski (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 453. Appealing to controversial "Pareto Principles," Zimmerman hopes to be able to compare at least some worlds with respect to moral value, despite the presence of infinite values.

[104] See *supra*, 432.

[105] A fact ignored by Rubio, "God Meets Satan's Apple," 2989, who gratuitously and, I should say, falsely assumes "that every strategy that it is metaphysically possible for God to deploy is available to God."

[106] Langtry, *God, the Best, and Evil*, 69.

[107] Thus the anti-Molinist William Hasker, who affirms that there are true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, emphasizes the difference between broadly logically possible worlds and worlds feasible for God (William Hasker, "*Can God Be Free?*: Rowe's Dilemma for Theology," *Religious Studies* 41, no. 4 [2005]: 461).

middle knowledge God has no idea what orders are feasible for him. If he blindly decrees that merely some created order or other exist, then he cannot be morally responsible for the consequences of his decree – except insofar as we judge him irresponsible for making any decree!

Even if we take divine omniscience to entail middle knowledge and we compare feasible orders of creation with one another, a difficulty remains. What about God's option of refraining from creation altogether? In such a case, there is no created order to serve as a point of comparison, and yet such a possible world is not infeasible for God. If we are comparing feasible created orders, then how can we include such an empty world in our comparison class? If we are not to revert to comparing possible worlds, then we need some other point of comparison than created orders. It seems to me that the best candidates for comparison here just are the different divine decrees that God might make, some of which are said to be better than others. A decree that no created order should exist might well be thought better than, for example, a decree that all created persons should go to hell. So one can compare the various decrees available to God in order to determine which, if any, decree is best.

Even so, an important ambiguity remains. In speaking of God's creative decree, we may be thinking either of the content of the decree, in which case we are referring to God's various options, or of the action of decreeing, in which case we are referring to God's choice of an option. The distinction is important because the connection between the value of God's options and the value of his choices is crucial for Rowe's argument. So the force of (1) seems to be that in terms of God's options there is either a best decree that God could have made or else an infinite hierarchy of ever better decrees. Either horn of this dilemma is said to be unacceptable for the traditional theist.

10.4.2 The Best Possible World and Divine Freedom

It seems to me that the first horn of the dilemma is easily challenged. In response to (2), the theist may reject either the claim that God's choice of the best possible world is necessary or that the necessity of God's choice is incompatible with its being free. Robert Adams has argued that God is under no necessity in virtue of his goodness to choose the best possible world.[108] For God might well choose to create an inferior world so that he might show grace towards the created persons in that world. If we think of a world as a created order of things, that contention seems quite plausible.

[108] Robert Merrihew Adams, "Must God Create the Best?," *Philosophical Review* 81, no. 3 (1972): 317–332.

But if we think of worlds as the content of the divine decree, then it seems that a decree which involves the manifestation of God's grace to his creatures is ipso facto a better decree.[109] It seems to be a widely accepted principle among philosophers that if a best option is available to an agent of which that agent is aware, then a perfectly rational and good agent will choose that option.[110] Notice that this principle has nothing to do with an agent's being obliged to choose a certain option. We have argued on the basis of DCT that God has no moral obligations, since he does not issue commands to himself. Therefore God is not morally obligated to issue the best decree that he can.[111] Still, if we recall our distinction between acting in accordance with duty and acting from duty, we find that many theists believe that if there is a best possible option available to God, then in virtue of his perfect goodness God will necessarily choose that option.

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[109] See Senor, "Defending Divine Freedom," 178, 181, who points out that if there is a single best world, it will be a world which exemplifies uniquely the best overall combination of values, moral and otherwise, including ample room for grace and unmerited love.

[110] For an extended argument see Langtry, *God, the Best, and Evil,* §§ 4.2–8. Tucker, however, maintains that even if there is a best option and no countervailing considerations, God can choose less than the best (Chris Tucker, "Divine Satisficing and the Ethics of the Problem of Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 37, no. 1 [2020]: 32–56).

[111] When Rubio says that "no world would be irrational or immoral for God to create. Even arbitrarily bad ones," does he mean that (i) God has no moral obligations and therefore is morally free to create any possible world consistent with his own just and loving nature, or that (ii) God's essential nature places no constraints whatsoever on what worlds are possible, so that God could have actualized a world in which he sends everyone to hell out of sadistic pleasure? Sometimes Rubio sounds as though he is endorsing (i), which seems quite plausible. For example, he writes, "[Marilyn] Adams denies that God has any obligations to (or concerning) creatures. This is equivalent to my claim that no norms govern the choice of world to create" (Rubio, "God Meets Satan's Apple," 3002–3003). In his conclusion he means to deny "the thesis that there is a world that God is morally or rationally obligated not to create. . . . This leaves one alternative for those who wish to remain theists: deny that God has obligations altogether" (3003). But in fact Rubio is more radical. He rejects

> 2. God then consults whatever truths of morality or rationality (*perhaps grounded in her* will or *character*), and 'eliminates' sufficiently bad worlds from consideration.

as "the fatal flaw" of the standard model of the divine creative decision. "No world is inconsistent with God's existence and status as creator as a result of being too bad to actualize" (2990). He says, "My own response to this argument should be clear: God neither has nor needs a standard of creatability. Everything is fair game" (3001).

Actually, Rubio's position may be less radical than at first appears. For he grants that "there are some worlds God could not create for definitional or analytic reasons, e.g. a world where there's a secret no one knows. Since God has to exist in any world God creates, and God has to be omniscient, worlds like this are impossible. But the reason for their impossibility is the way the definitions of key terms like 'God,' 'secret,' and 'knows' interact" (Daniel Rubio to William Lane Craig, December 7, 2021). But if God's essential omniscience serves to rule out such worlds, it seems to follow that God's essential love and justice would also serve to rule out the possibility of certain worlds. For example, Rubio says, "the world you contemplated, where everyone goes to hell as a result of God seeking sadistic pleasure, could consistently with my arguments be impossible – perhaps because of some interaction between the definitions of key terms in its description." We could still say that God is not subject to the norms of morality in the sense of having obligations. That seems to leave room for saying that there are feasible worlds which are too bad for God to decree and that there are worlds which are good enough in a limitless hierarchy of options because they are consistent with his nature.

If we concede this principle for the sake of argument, the question remains whether God's necessarily choosing the best option is compatible with his freedom. It seems to me that it is. In the first place, there is no reason whatsoever to think that there is exactly one best decree that God might issue. There is very plausibly an indefinite range of decrees available to God which are equally good and unsurpassable.[112] This fact is especially plausible in light of the fact that the range of options available to God are those which are feasible to him in light of the world-type-for-God that is true. Rowe insists that in such a case while God's choice of a particular world from the set of equally good creatable worlds may be free, God is still not free to refrain from creating altogether.[113] To my thinking, however, that is a triviality, since God still enjoys enormous, perhaps unlimited, freedom to choose among various options (one of which, for all we know, may be creating nothing at all).[114]

Moreover, and more importantly, God's freedom of choice is plausibly compatible with his choosing necessarily. Libertarian freedom does not entail the ability to do otherwise but rather the absence of external causal factors determining one's choice.[115] Senor points out that even if God's selecting the best possible world is necessary given his nature, still God's choice satisfies the conditions that have typically motivated libertarians to affirm the ability of free agents to do otherwise:

(i) God has effective choice over his creative decision (i.e., compatibilist freedom);
(ii) Neither the volition to create nor the creative act is strictly the result of an antecedent causal condition that predates God's existence;
(iii) God's creative action is not the result of a non-rational internal force.[116]

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[112] As Senor, "Defending Divine Freedom," 189, argues, we can imagine value-neutral differences between possible worlds, say, different underlying "stuff." Hence, Senor thinks that if neither the thesis of a limitless hierarchy of ever better worlds nor the Incommensurability Thesis is true, it seems "very, very unlikely" that the thesis of a single best world is true (188).

[113] Rowe, *Can God Be Free?*, 132.

[114] Senor argues that a world in which God alone exists might well be one of the very good incommensurable worlds. Perhaps a world in which the only existent is a necessary, absolutely perfect being is incommensurable with a very good world which includes such a being but also causally dependent non-perfect entities. "So if there are two or more incommensurate, very good, creatable worlds, and one of those worlds is a world with only God, then God can be free (in the strong, libertarian sense) both with respect to creating at all and with respect to which world to create if God creates" (Senor, "Defending Divine Freedom," 193). I see no reason to think that the decree of such a world could not be commensurable and among the best decrees God might make.

[115] See the classic paper by Harry G. Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy* 68, no. 1 (1971): 5–20.

[116] Senor, "Defending Divine Freedom," 184. Those who affirm God's atemporality sans creation can substitute for "predates" something like "is external to." Cf. Hill's provision of conditions for an action's being performed unfreely (Hill, *Divinity and Maximal Greatness,* 215–218).

In our discussion of divine omnipotence we saw that we should distinguish between an account in terms of God's power and an account in terms of the range of his options.[117] Just as God has the power to perform a sinful act but necessarily will not, so he has the power to bring about less than the best even if necessarily he will not in virtue of his perfect goodness. God's range of options' being restricted by his perfect goodness is no more an inhibition of his freedom than of his power.

Rowe thinks that the theist must maintain that God's freedom entails the ability to do otherwise, lest God no longer be worthy of praise and thanks.[118] But as we have already seen, we should not think of praise of God in terms of commending him for fulfilling his moral obligations, but rather in terms of adoration of the Supreme Good.[119] Moreover, it is entirely appropriate for the beneficiaries of a great good to thank their benefactor for his goodness to them, even if it is a necessary expression of his perfectly good nature.[120] Thanks to God is particularly appropriate if there are a number of worlds tied for the best, so that we are naturally grateful for the world that has been chosen.[121]

Rowe also contends that holding that there is a best possible world is difficult for the theist because he must then maintain with Leibniz that "the actual world with all its evil is a world than which it is logically impossible that there should be a better world than it," a conclusion that exposed Leibniz to ridicule.[122] But as Plantinga explains, Leibniz's failure to distinguish between broadly logically possible worlds and feasible worlds was precisely "Leibniz's Lapse."[123] When philosophers say that there is no best possible world, they are typically thinking of possible worlds in broadly logical terms. It is, indeed, plausible that there is no best possible world(s) in this sense. In terms of Christian theism, we can imagine worlds of universal salvation with ever greater

[117] See *supra*, 418–419.
[118] Rowe, *Can God Be Free?*, 2.
[119] So also Hasker: "The doctrine that it is appropriate to praise and thank God only for matters concerning which God has libertarian freedom is highly dubious; certainly it has never been accepted by the main Christian tradition. . . . There is indeed a certain kind of praise – *moral* praise, construed in a fairly narrow, more or less Kantian, sense – which requires libertarian freedom. But this sort of praise may not be especially relevant in relation to God" (Hasker, "*Can God Be Free?*," 460); and Senor: "What makes God praiseworthy is God's power together with God's nature as fair, merciful, and loving – God's embodying all that is valuable" (Senor, "Defending Divine Freedom," 185).
[120] Senor, "Defending Divine Freedom," 186, regards it, indeed, as our duty: "We owe our beneficiaries [*sic*] a debt of thanks when, motivated by a concern for our well being, they bestow benefits upon us."
[121] Hasker, "*Can God Be Free?*," 460–461.
[122] Rowe, *Can God Be Free?*, 132n43.
[123] Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, Clarendon Library of Logic and Philosophy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 180–184.

numbers of people attaining eternal beatitude and the knowledge of God, worlds that would plausibly constitute a limitless hierarchy of ever better worlds. But if, as previously indicated, our concern is not with ranking broadly logically possible worlds but rather worlds or created orders feasible for God, then it is less obvious that there is not a tier of best feasible worlds. I have elsewhere suggested that God's overriding desire, in light of his universal salvific will as expressed in the NT, is to bring about a created order in which an optimal balance between saved and lost obtains, where optimality is a function of both absolute numbers and the ratio between saved and lost.[124] Not only is it not implausible that such optimally balanced worlds are among God's options, but it is not implausible that the actual world is among them. In view of the eternal consequences, it is hard to conceive that any factor could be as important to God in assessing the value of feasible worlds. This might suggest that the goodness of such optimally balanced worlds might just swamp any value in less than optimally balanced worlds. In particular, earthly evils might be justly permitted in order to obtain the optimal balance of saved and lost.

As persuasive as this consideration seems to be, however, it is not compelling, since among worlds featuring such an optimal balance between saved and lost there might be other considerations making one such world preferable to another, for example, greater sanctification of the saved in one world as opposed to another. Or again, moral values are not the only values relevant to the goodness of some created order: perhaps aesthetic values help to make some optimally balanced worlds more preferable than others. But even then, we have no way of knowing whether the hierarchy of optimally balanced worlds is limitless. Perhaps earthly sanctification tops out somewhere or the balance between sanctified and unsanctified also requires optimal balancing. Similarly, it may be the case that a considerable degree of ugliness (as well as evil) is required in a world in order that the optimal balance between saved and unsaved is achieved. Once we focus our attention on worlds feasible for God, it is far from clear that there are no best feasible worlds.

Thus the theist need not be worried about the first horn of Rowe's dilemma.

[124] William Lane Craig, "'No Other Name': A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation through Christ," *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (1989): 172–188.

10.4.3 No Best World and Divine Perfection

But suppose that there is no best feasible world that God might have chosen. Are we then cast onto the second horn of the dilemma, that there is an infinite hierarchy of ever better worlds that God might have decreed? Not at all, for Rowe's dilemma is, in fact, a false one.

10.4.3.1 Incommensurability Thesis

A good many philosophers have defended the plausibility of the Incommensurability Thesis, that possible worlds (or created orders and, hence, divine decrees) might be incommensurable in their value and, hence, literally incomparable. Alexander Pruss identifies a number of factors that could contribute to such incommensurability, including the aforementioned mélange of moral and aesthetic values in worlds.[125] Pruss' claim that various possible worlds are incommensurable in their overall value strikes me as extremely plausible and goes for created orders as well as possible worlds. It does not preclude some worlds' being better than others but merely a single, limitless hierarchy of ever better worlds. Rowe takes scant cognizance of this alternative.[126] I do not see how Rowe can rule out the incommensurability of various feasible worlds, so as to maintain that if there is not a best feasible world there must be a single, infinite hierarchy of ever better worlds.

10.4.3.2 Infinite Hierarchy and Divine Perfection

But let us consider (3) on its own merits. This is Rowe's most interesting and challenging premise. Like Zeno's paradoxes of motion, Rowe's defense of this premise leads to a sharply counter-intuitive conclusion, yet exposing where the flaw lies is an extremely knotty problem. If there is no best option, then God is logically required to choose an option than which there is a better. No matter which option he chooses, there is always a better option which he could have taken.[127] This fact calls into question God's perfection in accord with Rowe's central principle

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[125] Alexander R. Pruss, "Divine Creative Freedom," in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 7: 213–238. See also Zimmerman, "Resisting Rowe's No-Best-World Argument," 453–460. Zimmerman reports that he has been unable to find conclusive reason to deny that, if God creates any contingent things, there will be a possible world in which what God creates is better, a modest conclusion that hardly sustains Rowe's burden of proof.

[126] Langtry thinks that Rowe would find it hard to deny that God is faced with multiple creatable hierarchies of incommensurable worlds (Langtry, *God, the Best, and Evil,* 83–85). Similarly, Rubio just assumes that all possible worlds are commensurable (Rubio, "God Meets Satan's Apple," 2988).

[127] I therefore do not understand why Rubio presents the creation problem as an example of a transfinite decision problem involving discontinuity in the limit (Rubio, 2992–2993). In such cases every choice is dominated by another choice up to the limit, which is dominated by every other choice. For example, one may enjoy with increasing pleasure drinking a delicious wine arbitrarily close to the dregs, then one drinks the

> B. If an omniscient being creates a world when there is a better world that it could have created, then it is possible that there exists a being morally better than it.[128]

Notice that (B) does not state that God could have been better than he is. It is enough that there could have been a being better than God is, namely, one who made a better choice. God cannot therefore be morally perfect.

10.4.3.2.1 Actions and Agents

(B) treats the goodness of a being as a function of the consequences of its actions, which appears to commit Rowe to an unacceptable consequentialism in ethics. We could instead link the goodness of the being to the goodness of its actions, per

> B′. If an omniscient being chooses an option when there is a better option that it could have chosen, then it is possible that there exists a being morally better than it.

It might be objected that according to DCT God has no moral obligations and therefore is under no obligation to choose a better option than the one he chooses. But even if God is under no obligation to choose a certain option, nevertheless his choice of an option than which there is a better can be alleged to call into question his perfect virtue.

Still, the question remains as to the connection between the worth of an action and the worth of its consequences and between the worth of an agent and the worth of his actions. As Thomas Morris says, "Simply put, the idea seems to be that, all else equal, the better the product, the better the act; the better the act the better the agent."[129]

Bruce Langtry would sever the supposedly necessary connection between the worth of an action and the worth of the consequences of that action, claiming that in every limitless hierarchy of creatable worlds there are infinitely many pairs of worlds *W* and *W** such that *W* is better than *W**,

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dregs, then one experiences an unpleasant taste. In the case of creation it is not the case that God's options get better and better up to the limit but the limit is worse than all the others.

[128] Rowe, *Can God Be Free?*, 91. The stipulation that the being is omniscient is required in order that the being be morally responsible for his choice. If there were better options of which the being in question is unaware, then that being could not be regarded as morally defective for having failed to choose one of them. Tucker calls this condition transparency. An agent "A's situation is *transparent* iff (i) A knows precisely what A's options are, and (ii) A knows the ranking of all A's options" (Tucker, "Satisficing and Motivated Submaximization (in the Philosophy of Religion)," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 93, no. 1 [2016]: 129).

[129] Thomas Morris, "Perfection and Creation," in *Reasoned Faith: Essays in Philosophical Theology in Honor of Norman Kretzmann*, ed. Eleonore Stump (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 241.

yet an omniscient being's creating *W* need not be a morally better action than his creating *W**.[130] In Langtry's analysis Rowe argues in support of (B) that (1) if an omniscient being creates a world when it could have created a better world, then that being has done something less good than it could do. But (2) any being that knowingly does something less good than it could do falls short of being the best possible being. Langtry charges that the argument involves equivocation. (1) may be understood as asserting either

> (1a) If an omniscient being creates a world when it could have created a better world, then that being has thereby performed *an action which is less good* than some alternative action.

or

> (1b) If an omniscient being creates a world when it could have created a better world, then that being has thereby performed an action whose total *causal consequences are less good* than those of some alternative action.

Similarly (2) may be understood as asserting either

> (2a) Any being that knowingly performs *an action which is less good* than some alternative action falls short of being the best possible being.

or

> (2b) Any being that knowingly performs an action whose total *causal consequences are less good* than those of some alternative action falls short of being the best possible being.

The problem is that while (1b) and (2a) are plausible, only maximizing act-consequentialists would regard (1a) and (2b) as more secure than (B) itself. In sum, "(1b) and (2a) look initially plausible, but they do not jointly entail Principle B."[131] Thus, God's decreeing a better feasible world than another need not be a better action.

Morris, on the other hand, would sever the allegedly necessary connection between the goodness of an action and the goodness of the agent who performs it. He notes that agents who perform different acts of supererogation may be equally good even if one of their supererogatory acts is of

[130] Langtry, *God, the Best, and Evil,* 71–73.
[131] Langtry, 73.

greater value than that of another.[132] Morris thus denies principles of the following sort:

> SS. If an act of supererogation *A* is better than another such act *B*, and an agent *S* does *B*, having been able to do *A* instead, without any overriding negative consequences, then *S* would have been a better agent if *S* had done *A* rather than *B*.

Treating creation as an act of supererogation on God's part, since God is not duty-bound to create, Morris denies "the inference that if God could have done better, God would have been better."[133] But without such an inference, Rowe's argument fails.

In response to Rowe's claim that "if an omnipotent being creates some world other than the best it can create, then it is possible there should exist a being morally better than it is,"[134] Morris points out that it is logically impossible for God, confronted with a hierarchy of ever better options, to choose a best option and therefore he cannot be faulted for choosing a good option while aware that he could have chosen a better option instead.[135] "Failing to do the best you can is a flaw or manifests an incompleteness in moral character. . . only if doing the best you can is at least a logical possibility. If doing the best he can in creating a world is for God an impossibility, . . . then not doing his best in creating cannot be seen as a flaw or as manifesting an incompleteness in the character of God."[136] Rowe grants the point but sees it as a red herring: "Of course, if it is logically impossible for there to be a best world, then God's not creating the best possible world does not count against his perfect goodness. Nowhere do I suggest that it does. What counts against God's perfect goodness (specifically, his moral perfection) is his creating a world when he could have created a world better than it."[137] Rowe distinguishes three different principles:

(a) Failing to do the best one can is a defect only if doing the best one can is possible for one to do.
(b) Failing to do better than one does is a defect only if doing better than one does is possible for one to do.

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[132] Morris, "Perfection and Creation," 241.
[133] Morris, 244. Morris, in effect, calls into question Langtry's (2a).
[134] William L. Rowe, "The Problem of Divine Perfection and Freedom," in Stump, *Reasoned Faith*, 228–229.
[135] Morris, "Perfection and Creation," 244; cf. Norman Kretzmann, "A Particular Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create This World?," in *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, ed. Scott MacDonald (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 238.
[136] Morris, "Perfection and Creation," 244.
[137] Rowe, *Can God Be Free?,* 101.

(c) Failing to do better than one does is a defect only if doing the best one can is possible for one to do.[138]

Rowe thinks that while (a) and (b) are true, (c) is false. And it is (c) that the critics in question need for their objection to work.

Now (c) does, indeed, seem obviously false. Suppose that I am an Olympic track star with unlimited potential, so that it is impossible for me to do my best in the scheduled race. But suppose that rather than trying to win the race, I am so slothful that I do not even try hard – maybe I just walk while everyone else runs, thereby letting down my team, my fans, and my country. In such a case it seems obvious that my failure to do better than I did is a genuine defect.

But surely the critics are not committed to so strong a principle as (c). Rather they deny that failing to do better than one does, when it is impossible to do one's best, is inevitably a defect, as Rowe's argument requires. The critics seem to be committed to no stronger a claim than

> (c#) Failing to do better than one does is *necessarily* a defect only if doing the best one can is possible for one to do.

That principle seems more plausible than (c). There are cases where failing to do better than one does would be a defect, but not always. In claiming that it is impossible that God be morally perfect if he chooses an option than which there is a better, Rowe must deny the truth of (c#), the falsity of which is far from obvious. Therefore, despite the initial plausibility of (B), its plausibility drops dramatically when contextualized within a limitless hierarchy of ever better options.[139]

10.4.3.2.2 Satisficing

Fortunately for the Christian systematic theologian, the issues raised by premise (3) overlap significantly with secular decision theory, which is a field of study exploring both normative and descriptive accounts of how decisions are rationally made, whether individually or collectively (game theory).

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[138] Rowe, 102. I have altered the tense to the present tense "does" for the sake of clarity. Rowe explains, "The expression 'failing to do better than one did' is here used to imply that the agent in question could have performed a better action than the action he in fact performed. . . . If at the time the agent performed the act he did it was not in his power to have done something better than that action, it is not true that the agent failed to do better than he did." There is no reason to treat the action as past. The idea, rather, is that whatever option the agent chooses, he could have chosen a better option, but he fails to do so.

[139] As noted by Senor, "Defending Divine Freedom," 177, following Edward Wierenga, "The Freedom of God," *Faith and Philosophy* 19, no. 4 (2002): 425–436. Senor thinks that "while Principle B is true if there is a best world (or worlds), if there is an infinity of increasingly good worlds, then this prima facie principle turns out to be false" (Senor, "Defending Divine Freedom," 179).

Decision theorists wrestling with the question of what a rational agent should do when faced with a hierarchy of ever better options point out that general principles of decision-making can be overridden in specific cases by countervailing considerations. For example, in line with (B′) it would normally be better to choose a better option if such an option is available. But that general principle is subverted when one is confronted with a limitless hierarchy of ever better options.[140] Then one finds oneself in the admittedly uncomfortable situation of choosing an option even though one knows that a better option is always available. In the literature this is called "satisficing."[141]

Decision theory plausibly requires rational agents to satisfice when faced with a limitless hierarchy of ever better options. Suppose, for example, that a genie offers to prolong your life for any finite number of good days, to be chosen by you.[142] Someone might point out that for any number n that you might pick, you would be better off if you picked $n+1$ instead. What to do? "You should satisfice – that is, choose a number that will secure an outcome which is good enough. Indeed, you are rationally required to do so. Satisficing will lead to a better outcome for you than failing to satisfice."[143] To fail to satisfice is inconsistent with the obvious truth that you should select some number, rather than walk away from the offer. In foregoing a better option, one exhibits no defect or lack in rationality.

The above concerns the rationality of satisficing. What about the morality of satisficing? If one satisfices, is one thereby morally less good than one might

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[140] Similarly, Rubio's *prima facie* principle

> NODOM: If there exists a strategy *A* that dominates some strategy *B*, then it is rationally impermissible to choose *B*.

is plausibly overridden by countervailing considerations like a limitless hierarchy of ever better options (Rubio, "God Meets Satan's Apple," 2991).

[141] A term coined by the Nobel Prize-winning economist Herbert Simon. Chris Tucker ("Satisficing and Motivated Submaximization") prefers to speak of submaximization and distinguishes between motivated and unmotivated submaximization. In motivated submaximization, one aims at as much of the good as one can get but chooses an option which is less than the best because one has countervailing considerations leading one to accept the good enough. In unmotivated submaximization, which Tucker identifies with satisficing, one chooses the good enough because one aims at the merely good enough. In Chris Tucker, "How to Think about Satisficing," *Philosophical Studies* 174, no. 6 (2017): 1366, Tucker acknowledges that "the labels here do not matter": we could as well speak of two sorts of satisficing, motivated and unmotivated. He notes that the typical defenders of satisficing, like Langtry, are defending motivated satisficing. Tucker observes that motivated satisficing is "widely endorsed and well defended" in the literature (Tucker, Satisficing and Motivated Submaximization," 134); indeed, noting that "there are few substantive philosophical positions that enjoy better support" than motivated satisficing (128; cf. 130), Tucker opines that "since motivated submaximization is so popular and well supported in the mainstream literature, it's not a substantial cost of these [theistic] defenses that they appeal to the claim that motivated submaximization can be appropriate" (138). Oddly, Tucker does not engage with Rowe's argument against a perfect being's satisficing out of countervailing considerations. In his "How to think about satisficing," Tucker defends the viability of even unmotivated satisficing.

[142] See Langtry, *God, the Best, and Evil,* 75–76.

[143] Langtry, 76.

have been? Analogous situations suggest not. For example, Dean Zimmerman imagines the case of an ideal gambler whose bets are a function of his confidence in the outcome: the more confident he is, the more money he bets.[144] So imagine that someone is willing to bet him that 2+2 = 5. In this case he has to pick some finite amount of money to bet, knowing that he could always bet more. But his choice of a certain amount to bet is no expression of a lack of confidence in the outcome. Similarly God's choice of an option than which there is a better is not an indication of a lack of perfect goodness.

Even more analogous to God's case would be the case of an ideal philanthropist who can bestow any finite amount of money on his beneficiaries. The fact that he must pick some finite amount, always knowing that he could have picked a greater amount, is no infraction of his generosity. In the same way, God's choice of a good world to bring about is no detraction from his goodness, even though by the very nature of the case he could have chosen a better world instead. Thus, it is possible for even a morally perfect being to choose less than the best when the options are limitlessly ever better.

Langtry also provides an ethical variant of his thought experiment. Suppose that you are the guardian of a child and are morally obligated to act in that child's interests. The genie offers to prolong the child's life for any finite number of good days, to be chosen by you. What should you do? "An argument similar to the one above leads to the conclusion that, morally speaking, you should satisfice for the sake of the child."[145] A plausible decision theory will recommend that moral agents "select some good state of affairs even though they could select a better one. Therefore it should not also recommend, of each available good state of affairs, that they not select that one. Therefore it should not declare that, whichever state of affairs they select, there is at least one alternative member of the hierarchy such that selecting it would be a morally better action."[146]

So Langtry denies Rowe's claim that if God creates a world than which there is a better, then he performs an action which is less good than a relevant alternative action and therefore falls short of moral perfection. Langtry reminds us that "It is logically necessary that an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good being cannot act in a morally better way. . . than he in fact acts."[147] So if there is no best world, it follows that there is a better world

[144] Zimmerman, "Resisting Rowe's No-Best-World Argument," 462–465; cf. 465–466 concerning an ideal traveler.
[145] Langtry, *God, the Best, and Evil,* 77. He points out that drawing the conclusion that there is no omniscient, perfectly good being provides no way out of the underlying ethical problem, which is equally raised by agents who are limited in knowledge, power, and goodness but are faced with an infinite hierarchy of ever better options.
[146] Langtry, 78.
[147] Langtry, 75.

*W** than the world *W* that God has created, but God's creating *W** need not be a morally better action than his creating *W*. Langtry agrees that *ceteris paribus* an agent who brings about the better state of affairs acts in the better way. Nevertheless, there are certain situations in which better consequences do not entail a better action. In other words, countervailing considerations can justify satisficing. The fact that God could have created a better world does not entail that God could have acted in a better way. We should resist the inference from the proposition

> *If the agent had chosen W* instead of W, then he would have chosen a better world.*

to the proposition

> *If the agent had chosen W* instead of W, then he would have chosen better.*

William Hasker goes further. He argues that Rowe's position is actually self-refuting. Hasker may be forgiven for resorting to symbolic notation to express Rowe's difficult to parse expression "Necessarily, one does not do the best one can." Letting x, y be actions, $x > y$ mean that x is better than y, and Px mean that the agent performs x, Hasker renders Rowe's expression as

> 1. $\mathrm{N}\,(x)[\mathrm{P}x \supset (\exists y)(\neg \mathrm{P}y \,\&\, \diamond(\mathrm{P}y \,\&\, [y > x])]$,

or, being interpreted, necessarily, for any action that is performed, there is a merely possible action that is better.[148] Assuming that $\mathrm{N}\,(\exists x)(\mathrm{P}x)$, since God must choose some option, Hasker derives the conclusion

> 9. $\mathrm{N}\,(x)[\mathrm{P}x \supset (\exists y)(\neg \mathrm{P}y \,\&\, \diamond(\mathrm{P}y \,\&\, [y > x])] \supset \mathrm{N}\,(\exists \mathrm{x})\ \mathrm{Px} \,\&\, (\exists \mathrm{y})(\neg \mathrm{P}y \,\&\, \diamond\,(\mathrm{Py} \,\&\, [\mathrm{y} > \mathrm{x}])$

In Rowe's idiom, (9) states that

> 9′. If, necessarily, one does not do the best one can, then, necessarily, one fails to do better than one does.

or more perspicuously, that if, necessarily, one does not do the best one can, then, necessarily, one could have done better.

Following Hasker, we find that principle (c#) is by contraposition logically equivalent to

[148] It is interesting that by quantifying over merely possible actions Hasker presupposes a neutral logic (cf. *supra*, 93). Quineans could render his premise $\mathrm{N}\,(x)[\mathrm{P}x \supset \neg(\exists y)(\mathrm{P}y) \,\&\, \diamond\,(\exists y)(\mathrm{P}y \,\&\, [y > x])]$.

> (c##) If doing the best one can is not possible for one to do, then it is not necessarily a defect if one fails to do better than one does.

Switching the modal operator we get

> (c###) If, necessarily, one does not do the best one can, then it is not necessarily a defect if one fails to do better than one does.

or, more colloquially, if it is impossible for one to do one's best, then failing to do better is not necessarily a defect. Performing similar transformations on (b), we have

> (b###) If, necessarily, one fails to do better than one does, then it is not necessarily a defect if one fails to do better than one does.

or, more colloquially, if it is impossible for one to do better, then failing to do better is not necessarily a defect.

Then we conjoin (b###) with (9′) to infer (c###) by Hypothetical Syllogism. But if (c###) is true, then Rowe's argument fails. Hasker concludes that on the supposition that there is no best creatable world or group of worlds, (B) and (c###) contradict each other, and since (c###) is true, "(B) is false and Rowe's argument collapses. This result is a conclusive refutation of Rowe's main argument."[149]

Rowe's response to Hasker's argument is curious. He thinks that Hasker has successfully proved that "God is not subject to criticism for creating *some world or other* from the series of creatable worlds. . . . Of course, Hasker is right. God isn't subject to criticism for creating *some world or other* than which there is a better."[150] But Rowe insists that God is still subject to criticism for creating any specific world that he chooses. For example, "he surely may be subject to criticism for creating, say, the least good world when he could have created instead a much better world."[151] In that case, "Would he still be at fault had he instead created a better world than the least good world? Yes. But he would not have been at fault for creating the least good world. Can he create a world and not be at fault for creating *that* world? No. For since there is no best world, he will be at fault no matter what world he creates."[152]

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[149] Hasker, "*Can God Be Free?*," 460.
[150] Rowe, *Can God Be Free?*, 111.
[151] Rowe, 111. Cf. Rowe's response to Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder that a god who has higher standards for what is the least acceptable world is better than a god with lower standards even if they both randomly select a world to create (Rowe, 93–94).
[152] Rowe, 109. This is the same difficulty pressed by Rubio, "God Meets Satan's Apple," 2995–2996.

Langtry takes up Rowe's challenge posed by minimally acceptable worlds. Langtry agrees that in order for a wise choice among options to be possible there must be standards of acceptability and guidelines for choosers. In Langtry's longevity illustration, for example, it would be irrational to choose just one year of prolonged life; rather we should choose a number which is high enough. Presumably, in the ethical variant of the story there will also be recommendations concerning the number of days chosen for the child. But in such cases there comes point at which one is not morally better for picking n rather than $n+1$ for the number of days. Any such number Langtry deems "admissible." A plausible decision theory will imply that for some admissible number n, even though you will be better off if you select $n+1$ instead, it is not more rational to select $n+1$ rather than n. In the ethical case, regardless of the moral perfection of the chooser, the decision theoretical question is which of one's available options are such that choosing another option would not be morally better and which are such that choosing another option would be morally better. Where is the "cut off" line?

Our answer will depend, says Langtry, on our assumptions about the values whereby our options are ranked. Are they such as to permit us to delineate options which are "good enough" from those that are not?[153] As previously mentioned, it seems to me plausible that the salvific balance displayed by various feasible worlds will be of paramount importance to God in the ranking of worlds. There are options displaying so terrible a balance between saved and lost that they are unacceptable to God. If all the worlds available to God that are inhabited by moral agents were such worlds, then God would choose simply to refrain from creating any of them and might well choose to refrain from creating altogether.

[153] *Prima facie* Tucker appears to be addressing this question in his "Divine Satisficing." But his notion of the "good enough" is not the same as the threshold of admissibility. On his account God has requiring reasons to create a world with what he calls "full creaturely goodness," but that requiring reason may be overcome by countervailing considerations. Now since being an option in a limitless hierarchy of ever better options is itself a countervailing consideration, it seems that no world is bad enough to be inadmissible. What Tucker here sets is merely a threshold at which God no longer has requiring reasons to select an option. But there seems to be no bottom, so to speak, to the hierarchy of creatable worlds.

In personal correspondence (Chris Tucker to William Lane Craig, December 9, 2021), Tucker floats three criteria of admissibility:

1. Eliminate any feasible world in which God would violate some deontic constraint to bring that world about, e.g., violate someone's rights.
2. Eliminate any world in which God would allow a creature to have less than full goodness without an adequate justification. If full goodness for free creatures requires beatitude, then (2) includes eliminating any world in which a free creature would fail to achieve beatitude without an adequate justification.
3. Any remaining feasible world is admissible.

Given DCT, I should be more inclined to speak of God's acting inconsistently with his love and justice than in violation of some deontic constraint. The question left open by (1) is how bad the salvific balance could get. (2) strikes me as quite acceptable, except that I am inclined to think in term of persons rather than mere creatures.

Langtry proposes that a world is good enough if it is "non-disappointing" in the light of the values that underlie the ranking of worlds and, moreover, is abundantly better than those worlds that barely escape being disappointing.[154] This language can be misleading. In one sense a world in which even one sinner is lost is disappointing to God. But such a world may still be, in Tucker's terminology, "choice worthy."[155] What is meant by "disappointing" in this context is "not choice worthy." "Worlds" that are not choice worthy will be so because they are inconsistent with God's nature as a perfectly just and loving being. Seen in this light, such options are not really possible worlds after all, since they are incompatible with God's nature and so not actualizable. There are, in fact, no worlds which are disappointing to God in this sense. Indeed, given that all feasible worlds must be consistent with God's nature, it is not clear that there are worlds exhibiting a minimally acceptable salvific balance in comparison with worlds having a better balance. God necessarily chooses a world which exhibits an optimal balance between saved and lost, and choosing any such world is an equally good action. So it is very far from clear that there are, in fact, worlds that just barely escape being disappointing. Any world which is consistent with God's perfectly just and loving nature is acceptable and choice worthy.[156] If there are ever better feasible worlds, God may freely satisfice by decreeing one of those exhibiting an optimal balance between saved and lost. They are all good enough. Such a theological account of the good enough seems to be both principled and demanding enough.

So Rowe's claim that it is always possible for a being with higher standards of acceptability to exist and, hence, for a better being to exist, is plausibly false. Rowe says that it is tempting to argue as follows:

> But what if a perfectly good, omnipotent, omniscient being exists and just finds himself in the following situation: he sees that there is an infinite number of increasingly better possible worlds and no best world. Suppose also that this being knows that it is better to create a good world than not to create at all. What is the being to do? Surely, being good he will chose to

[154] Langtry, *God, the Best, and Evil,* 81.

[155] See Tucker, "Divine Satisficing." Langtry speaks of worlds that are not "flawed, deficient, or disappointing relative to the values that underlie the ranking of worlds" (Langtry, *God, the Best, and Evil,* 80).

[156] Thus we should reject Rubio's principle

> NO WORST: unless it is the only strategy available, if a is dominated by every other available strategy, then a is impermissible.

(Rubio, "God Meets Satan's Apple," 2994). Even if the consequences of rejecting (NO WORST) were adopting a "disunified, piecemeal approach" to ever better decision problems (3002), that is a trivial price to pay compared to Rowe's alternative that a perfect being does not exist or Rubio's alternative that God's creation of a purely evil world is compatible with God's perfection.

> create a very good world, a world, nevertheless, than which there is a better possible world that he could have created instead. If this is so, isn't it simply a mistake to then claim that this supremely perfect being isn't really perfect after all? For to so claim is to hold him to blame for something he was simply not able to do: create a world than which there is no better creatable world.
>
> What we've come to see is that this reply supposes that each of two internally consistent propositions is consistent with the other. The two propositions are:
>
> There exists an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being who creates a world.
>
> and
>
> For any creatable world there is a better creatable world.
>
> And the principle that enables us to see the inconsistency is Principle B: *If an omniscient being creates a world when there is a better world that it could have created, then it is possible that there exists a being morally better than it*.[157]

This resort to Principle B appears to be question-begging in light of Hasker's demonstration that Principle B is false by Rowe's own lights. If Rowe's position is self-refuting, then any appeal to that principle is nugatory. Since Rowe is committed to (9) and (b), his response to Hasker must be that (c) under one interpretation (namely, if it is impossible for one to do one's best, then it is no defect to select some surpassable option or another) is acceptable after all but not under another interpretation (namely, that if it is impossible for one to do one's best, then it is no defect to select any particular surpassable option). But the former is not a plausible interpretation of (c), much less (c###), which plainly states that it is not (necessarily) a defect to choose one particular option rather than a better option out of the limitless hierarchy of options.

I fail to see how Rowe has shown in a non-question-begging manner that a perfectly good, omnipotent, omniscient being who finds himself in the situation described above is not free to choose any acceptable option. Even the least valuable world compatible with God's perfect nature will be a very good world, and so God exhibits no defect in selecting it. Minimally,

[157] Rowe, *Can God Be Free?*, 111–12. Cf. Senor's quite different conclusion: "If there is an infinite hierarchy of increasingly good worlds, then the creative product of a morally perfect. . . Creator will be surpassable. Thus, while Principle B is true if there is a best world (or worlds), if there is an infinity of increasingly good worlds, then this prima facie principle turns out to be false" (Senor, "Defending Divine Freedom," 179).

Rowe has not shown that he does. But then neither does God exhibit any moral defect in choosing any other world.

Daniel Rubio reminds us that we should be cautious about overturning plausible judgements with the theories that we construct. "If we find a formal theory that looks good, but does not cohere with our judgments about cases, we should look for an alternative theory that does so cohere. It should take a very powerful result, like an inability to find any coherent theory of value that affirms our judgment, before we abandon intuition at some formal theory's say-so."[158] This seems to me precisely the case with Rowe's argument based upon the theoretical principle (B). It seems to me that the scenario described above of what a perfect being faced with a choice among a limitless hierarchy of options might indefectibly do is very plausible and trumps principle (B).

10.4.4 Summary

Whether we adopt the position that there is a best of all feasible worlds or not, there is no good reason to infer that God's freedom and perfection are incompatible. If there is a best feasible world that God decrees, he does so freely, since he decrees as he does in the absence of external causally determining factors or irrational impulses. As the paradigmatic Good, he is the appropriate object of adoration and thanksgiving. Moreover, given the world-type-for-God with which he must work, the actual world might be, for all we know, the best world feasible for God. But even if there is no best feasible world, it is very plausible that God's available options are incommensurable, so that he is confronted neither with a best world nor an infinite hierarchy of ever better worlds. And even if he is confronted with such a single, ordered hierarchy, satisficing is a popular and well-defended strategy among decision theorists which God may adopt without sullying his moral character. The claim that an agent is morally imperfect because he chooses an option than which he knows there is a better is subverted by the presence of a limitless hierarchy of ever better options. By severing the necessary connection between the goodness of an option and the goodness of an action or, alternatively, between the goodness of an action and the goodness of an agent, we preserve God's goodness when choosing from a limitless hierarchy of ever better divine decrees.

[158] Daniel Rubio, "In Defence of No Best World," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 98, no. 4 (2020): 814–815.

10.5 Concluding Remarks

God's moral perfection is indicated in Scripture by his perfect righteousness, which comprises both his justice and love. We should resist attempts to reduce God's moral perfection to his love, for such reductionism neglects God's retributive justice. Retributive justice is plausibly essential to God's goodness, being itself a good displayed in God's eschatological judgement of the wicked, who are finally given their just desert. God himself is the paradigmatic Good, resemblance to whom constitutes creatures' goodness. God's commands to us, which reflect his perfect goodness, constitute our moral duties. Attempts to show that God's perfect goodness is incompatible with his freedom are eminently resistible, so that no incoherence of these divine attributes has been demonstrated.[159]

[159] I am grateful to David Baggett, Daniel Hill, William Hasker, Ryan Mullins, Daniel Rubio, Chris Tucker, and Dean Zimmerman for interaction on issues raised in this section.

11
Summary and Conclusion

Our exploration of the divine nature has yielded rich rewards. On the basis of God's self-revelation in Scripture and philosophical reflection upon perfect being theology, we have come to a robust conception of God's nature. God is essentially an immaterial, personal being distinct from the universe, a personal, transcendent Mind. He exists necessarily, not merely in the sense that he exists in every broadly logically possible world but also in the sense that at every time in any world it is true that God exists. He is self-existent, the sole ultimate reality, the Creator of everything distinct from himself. He is simple in the sense that he has neither separable parts nor metaphysical constituents, even if he is complex in having conceptually distinct properties and unlimited potentialities to be and act differently. He has the essential property of knowing every truth and believing no falsehood, having not only knowledge of future contingent propositions but also middle knowledge of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, both of which are fully compatible with human libertarian freedom. Not only does he have propositional omniscience, but he also enjoys all appropriate non-propositional knowledge *de se*. He is eternal in the sense that he exists permanently, without beginning or end, and therefore plausibly omnitemporally since the first moment of creation in virtue of his real relation to the temporal world and his knowledge of tensed facts. As the sole ultimate reality, God must exist spacelessly explanatorily prior to creation, space being either a created substance or else something reducible to or derivative from relations among physical things, which makes it

Systematic Philosophical Theology: On God: Attributes of God, Volume IIa, First Edition.
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plausible that he continues to transcend space, since neither the creation of space nor causing effects in space are spatial acts. He is omnipresent in the sense that he is cognizant of and causally active at every place in space. He is omnipotent in the sense that there is no state of affairs that he is unable to actualize due to a lack of power on his part and there are no non-logical limits to the range of things he can do. Finally, God is not only perfectly good, comprising both love and justice as dual aspects of his righteousness, but is the very paradigm of moral perfection, the standard determining the goodness of everything else in all creation. Not only so, but our moral duties are determined by his commands to us, our moral obligations, permissions, and prohibitions arising as a result of imperatives issued by the supremely qualified moral authority.

We have thus arrived at a rich concept of God that is both biblically consonant and philosophically plausible. The Christian God is not therefore some ill-defined reality to be described only in a *via negativa* or apprehended only in mystical experience, nor are his attributes mere labels without content. Rather his essential attributes are capable of careful explication and defense. Of course, this is only half the story, for the Christian God is also uniquely conceived to be a Trinity of divine persons, to which subject we shall turn in part II of this locus.

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William Lane Craig.

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